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Ban 23 breeds of ferocious dogs: Centre tells states

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Defiant Vidarbha prolongs Mumbai's wait

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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BJP drops Kateel & Simha; picks Yaduveer, Dr Manjunath

BJP replaces 9 incumbent MPs in 1st list of 20 LS candidates

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

BJP on Wednesday announced candidates for 20 out of 28 Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka.

The list includes Mysuru royal scion Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar from Mysuru and former chief minister Basavaraj Bommai from Haveri, Dr CN Manjunath from Bangalore Rural.

Union Minister of State Shobha Karandlaje, who was facing resistance for re-nomination from Udupi-Chikmagalur, has been shifted to Bengaluru North, which is currently represented by former chief minister DV Sadananda Gowda.

The party has replaced nine sitting MPs including former chief minister Sadananda, Pratap Simha from Mysuru and former state BJP chief Nalin Kumar Kateel from Dakshina Kannada.

Kota Srinivas Poojary, who is currently the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council, would now contest from Udupi-Chikmagalur. In Bellary, the party has fielded ST community leader and former Minister B Sriramulu.

Noted cardiac surgeon and former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda's son-in-law Manjunath has been fielded from Bengaluru Rural Lok Sabha, where he will face sitting Congress MP and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's brother DK Suresh.

Those who have retained the candidature include Annasaheb Jolle (Chikkodi), PC Gaddigoudar (Bagalkot), Ramesh Jigajinagi (Vijayapura), Umesh Jadhav (Kalaburagi), Bhagwanth Khuba (Bidar), Pralhad Joshi (Dharwad), BY Raghavendra (Shivamogga), P C Mohan (Bengaluru Central) and Tejasvi Surya (Bengaluru South).

Former minister V Somonna has been given a ticket from Tumakuru, which was represented by GS Basavaraj, and in Davangere segment, sitting MP G M Siddeshwara has been replaced by his wife Gayathri Siddeshwara.

Basavaraj Kyavator has got the ticket in Koppal replacing Karadi Sanganna, Sriramulu in Bellary in place of Y Devendrappa, Bommai in Haveri in place of Shivakumar Udasi, Brijesh Chowta in Dakshina Kannada replacing Kateel, and S Balaraj in Chamarajanagar instead of Srinivas Prasad.

Chamarajanagar MP V Srinivas Prasad and Haveri MP Shivakumar Udasi had already announced political retirement after the current term ends. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2 and 3

Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar; Basavaraj Bommai; Dr CN Manjunath; Shobha Karandlaje Pralhad Joshi and Annasaheb Jolle are in the list ***PHOTO: PTI/ANI/X***

Eight-lane Bengaluru corridor opens, but work still in progress

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

The eight-lane signal-free corridor at Okalipuram junction, which was aimed at easing the bottleneck faced by residents of Rajajinagar and Vijayanagar to reach Majestic, was inaugurated on Wednesday without the project being fully completed.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge inaugurated the Rs 356 crore project, which includes land acquisition cost by Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP).

As part of the eight-lane project, one-way flyovers each from Rajajinagar and Malleshwaram to Krantivira Sangolli Rayanna Bengaluru Railway Station, an underpass beneath Bengaluru-Tumakuru railway track and a pedestrian flyover were inaugurated. However, the construction of these two flyovers and the underpass were not completed.

Besides, two underpasses under Bengaluru-Chennai line are also under progress. Once the project is completed, the traffic movement from Majestic to Rajajinagar and to the main gain gate of the railway station will be easier.

For vehicular movement, four concrete boxes under Chennai- Bengaluru railway line and four boxes under Tumakuru-Bengaluru railway line were placed. Traffic allowed from the underpass at Bengaluru-Tumakuru railway line helps vehicles reach the KSR railway station from both front and back entries.

A 15-foot bronze statue of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi built at a cost of Rs 2.6 crore was installed at Rajiv Junction Circle in Seshadripuram.

—Salar News

PHOTO: AP

19-year-old abducted, raped; ends life in Mysuru

MYSURU, 13 MARCH

A 19-year-old girl died by suicide after she was abducted and raped by a 38-year-old man in Shyanabhoganahalli in Hunsur, Mysuru on Tuesday. The victim had allegedly been kidnapped by accused Venugopal of her village on 14 February. The accused who is already married reportedly assured the victim of marrying her and took her forcefully in a jeep and drove away to Kerala and allegedly raped her. The abduction reportedly took place about four days before the victim's marriage to a different boy. He raped her for two days and dropped her off at the Nanjangud bus stand on 17 February and told her to go home. Then he fled from the scene. The abduction reportedly took place about four days before the victim's marriage to a different boy. *—Salar News*

Modi lays foundation stone of 3 semiconductor units

LONDON, 11 MARCH

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated and addressed the youth in the 'India's Techade: Chips for Viksit Bharat' on Wednesady at 10:30 am via video conferencing. He also laid the foundation stone of three semiconductor projects worth about Rs 1.25 lakh crore with the goal of 'Development of Semiconductors and Display Manufacturing Ecosystems in India'. *—PTI*

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21 Indians detained in Lanka for working illegally

COLOMBO, 13 MARCH

Sri Lankan authorities have detained 21 Indian nationals for illegally operating a computer-operated business violating the relaxed tourist visa norms, authorities said on Wednesday. The arrested men in the age group of 24 to 25, who were in Sri Lanka on tourist visas, were detained on Tuesday by the Department of Immigration and Emigration, a senior immigration officer said on the condition of anonymity. Under Sri Lanka's law, those who visit the island nation on tourist visas are prohibited from engaging in any paid or unpaid work. *—PTI*

Kerala govt to move SC against CAA

T'PURAM, 13 MARCH

Kerala Law Minister P Rajeev on Thursday informed that the state government will challenge Centre's Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) in Supreme Court, adding that it will pray to the apex court to declare the act as "anti-Constitutional". "Earlier, we had approached Supreme Court, against CAA. Our prayer was that it was against the basic structure of the Constitution. It is against the basic fundamental principles of the Constitution, and we pray to declare the CAA anti-Constitutional. Now we have decided to approach Supreme Court again and we have a ligated advocate general to interact with our Senior Counsel in Supreme Court," Rajeev said. *—PTI*

Water supply will get stable in a month: BWSSB Chairman

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

With the Silicon Valley of India facing never-before water scarcity, BWSSB Chairman V Ram Prasath Manohar is the man of the moment whom residents look up to quench their thirst. **Vaishnavi Gopalraj** of **Salar News** caught up with the IPS-turned-IAS officer on his plans to tackle Bengaluru's water woes. He said the water supply will stabilise within a month.

Manohar, who became Chairman of Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) in December 2023, said they are supplying water via tankers to 257 most affected areas in the City.

Q: How does BWSSB plan to regulate the prices of private water tankers following the State government's order? Despite government monitoring, the tankers continue to charge the same amount.

A: BWSSB will regulate the prices of private water tankers from 15 March. Each registered tanker will be assigned a number, and a pricing card will be affixed to them. These tankers will be dispatched to areas experiencing water scarcity, and they will charge prices according to the rates specified on the pricing card. If any tanker fails to adhere to these regulations, residents can lodge complaints by dialling 1916 by providing the tanker's number.

Q: Is the official helpline of BWSSB (1916) being monitored as citizens affected by the water crisis complain about its unavailability?

A: Yes, BWSSB is monitoring the 1916 helpline. However, there have been issues with computer systems and due to which the helpline is fully operational for only one hour a day. This has resulted in difficulties for the team in addressing concerns during the rest of the time. BWSSB is working to resolve these problems promptly. *—Salar News*

>>>Continued on Page 2

People collect free drinking water from a BWSSB tanker amid crisis, in Bengaluru, on Wednesday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

SALAR EXCLUSIVE

V Ram Prasath Manohar ***PHOTO: SALAR NEWS***

MODI TO KICK-OFF LS POLL CAMPAIGN FROM KALABURAGI

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi to visit Karnataka on 16 and 18 March to address public gatherings in Kalaburagi which is the home turf of AICC President M Mallikarjun Kharge ahead of Lok Sabha polls. He will also visit Shivamogga. Kharge, was elected to Lok Sabha from there in 2009 and 2014 but lost to BJP's Umesh Jadhav in the last general elections.

Modi is likely to begin his South India campaign for the polls on 15 March. BJP State General Secretary and MLA Sunil Kumar on Wednesday said, that all the preparations have been made for Prime Minister's two-day visit. *—Salar News*

TO PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

CM appoints 5 ministers as government spokespersons

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday appointed five Cabinet ministers as spokespersons to project the achievements of his administration. Health and Family Welfare Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao, Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Priyank Kharge, Wildlife and Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre and Labour Minister Santhosh Lad were selected as the spokepersons.

"I have full confidence that all these ministers who have been appointed as government spokespersons will effectively present the achievements of the government before the people of the state," he was quoted as saying by his office on X. In the official communication about their appointment, the Chief Minister directed the Chief Secretary to instruct the heads of departments to take measures so as to provide them from time to time documents and information about the government's achievements.

—Salar News with Agencies

Siddaramaiah ***PHOTO: ANI***

- Health and Family Welfare Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao, Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Priyank Kharge, Wildlife and Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre were selected as the spokepersons.

3 vessels to arrive at Vizhinjam from China

T'PURAM, 13 MARCH

Three more vessels from China will be arriving at the Vizhinjam seaport here next month, bringing with them 17 more cranes for the international deep-sea facility being built at a cost of Rs 7,700 crore, the Vizhinjam International Seaport Ltd (VISL) said on Wednesday.

The three ships will reach Vizhinjam coast on 4, 17 and 23 April VISL said in a statement.

The first vessel will have six cantilever railmounted gantry cranes, the second one will be carrying two ship-to-shore cranes and four cantilever rail-mounted gantry cranes and the third will have two ship-to-shore cranes and three cantilever rail-mounted gantry cranes, it said.

Till now, 15 cranes have been transported to the seaport from China, the statement said.

The first ship docked at the deep-sea facility in October last year.

The Vizhinjam port is being constructed under the public-private partnership model.

The Adani Group is the private partner in the development of what will become one of the largest ports in the world, once commissioned.

The project, scheduled to be commissioned in 2019, was delayed due to issues with land acquisition.

Fishermen had carried out violent protests opposing it, alleging that the port would adversely affect their livelihood. *—PTI*

- Three more vessels from China will be arriving at the Vizhinjam seaport here, bringing with them 17 more cranes for the international deep-sea facility being built at a cost of Rs 7,700 crore, the Vizhinjam International Seaport Ltd (VISL) said on Wednesday.

HONOURING RAJIV GANDHI

Mallikarjun Kharge, Siddaramaiah, DK Shivakumar unveil Rajiv Gandhi's newly installed statue in Bengaluru, on Wednesday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

NATIONAL NO SMOKING DAY

City bars, restaurants to remove illegal smoking spots

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Bengaluru City Police has directed hotels, bars, restaurants, clubs and pubs to remove illegal Designated Smoking Areas (DSA).

In the wake of National No Smoking Day celebrated on 13 March, the City police said establishments should adhere to smoke-free laws outlined in Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) 2003 and subsequent amendments. The establishments should remove all illegal DSAs that do not comply with COTPA regulations and follow a circular issued by Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike on 28 August, 2018.

DSAs must be established with specified guidelines, including adequate ventilation and clear demarcation to protect non-smokers from second-hand smoke, the City police said in 'X' platform. Food, beverages or tobacco products should be prohibited in DSAs to discourage smoking and to ensure the safety of non-smokers. Establishments are also required to prominently display signage, indicating DSA rules and regulations, police said.

On National No Smoking Day, the police urged cooperation and compliance from establishments to promote public health and foster a smoke-free environment. Police said they will conduct routine inspections to enforce compliance, with violators facing penalties such as fines, imprisonment, or potential cancellation of trade licences.

—Salar News

Establishments should adhere to smoke-free laws outlined in Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act 2003 and amendments ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Will monitor Holi parties, water parks: BWSSB head

He says the focus is to supply water to schools and hospitals; soon population in apartment complexes will be studied

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

While the City grapples with the worsening water crisis, the person who is at the centre of it all is BWSSB Chairman V Ram Prasath Manohar. **Vaishnavi Gopalraj of Salar News** caught up with the officer on his plans to tackle Bengaluru's water woes.

The Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) chief has assured residents that the City's water supply is currently secure. With 1,450 MLD (millions of litre per day) of water sourced from Cauvery River and efforts underway to bridge the remaining gap of 600 MLD through borewells and treated water, he said the water supply will stabilise within a month. Besides, with Holi coming up on 25 March, the authorities will monitor Holi parties since they tend to use a lot of water.

Q: Residents in water crisis-hit areas such as Chamrajpet, Bhubaneswarnagar, Rajajinagar and Peenya are facing challenges due to the lack of awareness regarding water release timings and the inaccessibility of water tankers. Has any arrangement been made?

A: To alleviate the difficulties faced by residents in these areas, BWSSB will install 3,000-litre Sintex tanks and will refill them periodically. Residents can then take water from these tanks. This initiative has been implemented in areas such as Peenya and Goraguntepalya, with feedback being gathered to improve the plan.

BWSSB Chairman V Ram Prasath Manohar (left); Residents fill drinking water from a BWSSB tank at Rajarajeshwari Nagar on Wednesday **PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD**

SALAR EXCLUSIVE

Q: How much is the shortfall of water in the City?

A: There is a current shortfall of 150-200 MLD in water supply due to decreasing groundwater levels. We are facing this huge challenge to fill up tanks and lakes with treated water to enhance the groundwater table. There is also the need to understand the importance of using treated water for non-drinking purposes and we urge residents for a behavioural shift in water usage. "BWSSB has collaborated with Indian Institute of Science to implement Filter Borewell technology wherein borewell water will be treated for drinking. "The overall shortage of 200 MLD caused by drying borewells can be addressed by utilising treated water, recharging groundwater and minimising water wastage," he added.

Q: How is BWSSB planning to address the water crisis affecting schools, colleges, hospitals and apartments?

A: Currently, our focus is on ensuring uninterrupted water supply to essential institutions such as schools, colleges and hospitals. There are no restrictions on water supply to these establishments. However, for bulk consumers, including those hosting parties such as Holi and water parks, we will strictly monitor their usage. Regarding apartments, we are conducting a study to determine the population in each complex.

Q: With IPL matches set to draw nearly 40,000 attendees to Bengaluru amid the ongoing water crisis, what preparations are being made to accommodate the influx?

A: We have requested data from M Chinnaswamy Stadium regarding the water requirements for IPL matches. Our team is analysing this information to develop a plan that will accommodate the needs of the cricket fans and stadium while also mitigating any potential loss of water resources.

Q: How much water does the City need in the next six months?

A: Water requirement for the next five months is estimated at 8,000 million cubic feet (TMC), and the City has an adequate water supply to meet these needs.

Q: Do you think we are staring at a drought-like situation?

A: The present situation is a natural calamity and not a result of any mismanagement. The crisis will not have any impact on Bengaluru's image.

The BWSSB top boss said once the 5th phase of the Kaveri project is implemented from 15 May, the current situation will be much easier to tide over.

—Salar News

98% OF LAKES ENCROACHED IN BENGALURU: IISC PROF

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Indian Institute of Science Professor TV Ramachandra on Wednesday said that 98 per cent of lakes are encroached in Bengaluru leading to the water crisis in the City. He was speaking at a conference of the Panchabhuta Conservation Foundation. City water bodies are contaminated with metallic elements. The same water is used to provide water to the vegetation leading to a higher case of kidney failures. 1 in 5000 people has kidney issues, said Ramachandra. In the last three decades, the State has lost 70 per cent of water bodies and 18 per cent of forest cover, he added. The designation has paved the way to create a trillion-dollar business in the wetlands. The conference was on the importance of Aghanashini Estuary, recently designated as Ramsar wetland.The Ramsar application was submitted in 2008 by Ramachandra. However, the government wanted to convert it into a Thermal plant in 2006 and a port in 2014.He claimed that the Bureaucracy of the State took more than 2.5 years just to pass the files for approval.

—Salar News

Will not release a drop of water to Tamil Nadu: CM

C'NAGAR, 13 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramiah said that the government will not be in a position to release water to Tamil Nadu even if the Centre asks it to do so. He made these remarks on Tuesday after BJP held a protest at Bengaluru's Freedom Park against the shortage of water in the state capital.

Denying allegations by BJP that the government is releasing water from the Cauvery River to Tamil Nadu, he said, "That's all lie what BJP is saying, we can release water only if we have water. That's a lie. When we don't have water to release, we don't even give a single drop of water to Tamil Nadu or any others. Even Tamil Nadu didn't ask for water."

According to local reports, water sources in many villages across the State have dried up. The problem has been further compounded by the depletion of groundwater and the drying up of more than 3000 borewells in the City.

Amid the water crisis in the city, the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) have prohibited the use of drinking water in swimming pools.

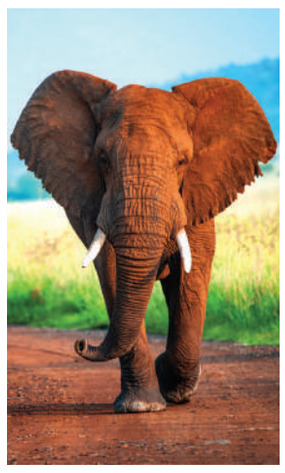
—ANI

State launches Asha Kirana for Transport Dept staff

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Department of Health and Family Welfare launched a new initiative called "Asha Kirana" to provide free eye care for employees of the State Transportation Department. The initiative aims to equip primary health centres, community health centres, taluk hospitals, and bus depots across the state to conduct improved eye screening for refractive errors and retinopathies. Alongside check-ups, free spectacles will be provided to the public.Speaking at the event, Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao said, that under the programme over 1 crore individuals have already undergone eye check-ups, 39,000 have benefited from free cataract surgeries, and 2.45 lakh people availed of free spectacles. "The initiative will help 1.1 crore BMTC and KSRTC staff," he said.

—Salar News



Elephant tramples migrant worker to death in Kodagu

MADIKERI, 13 MARCH

A migrant woman labourer was trampled to death by an elephant in Kodagu on Wednesday.According to forest officials, the incident occurred in a coffee estate in ChennangiAbbur in Virajpet of Kodagu. The deceased Ajabanu, 38, was a migrant Assamese woman, who worked in the coffee estates for the past three years.The woman was rushed to the Polibetta government primary health centre but she succumbed to injuries. Soon after the incident, villagers and estate workers protested and blocked roads in Kodagu. They demanded compensation of Rs 50 lakh and a solution for the jumbo menace. *—Salar News*

Yaduveer makes political debut with BJP ticket

BENGALURU,13 MARCH

Mysuru royal scion Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar will be making his foray into electoral politics, with BJP fielding him as its candidate from Mysuru Lok Sabha segment, replacing sitting MP Pratap Simha.

The US-educated Yaduveer, 31, was crowned as the titular head of the erstwhile Mysuru royal family on 28May, 2015, making him the 27th 'King' of the Wadiyar dynasty. Pramoda Devi Wadiyar, widow of Srikantadatta Narasimharaja Wadiyar, the last descendant of the Wadiyar dynasty, adopted Yaduveer Gopal Raj Urs as they did not have any children, after which he was rechristened as Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar.

Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar **PHOTO: X**

Yaduveer, who enjoys playing the guitar and the Saraswati Veena, has completed his BA in Economics and English at University of Massachusetts, Amherst in the US. He is the grandson of Princess Gayatri Devi, the eldest daughter of the last Maharaja, Jayachama rajendra Wadiyar. Interested in history, Yaduveer also plays tennis and is a horse racing enthusiast.

He is married to Trishika Kumari Wadiyar, who hails from the Dungarpur Royal Family in Rajasthan. Trishika's father Harshavardhan Singh was a BJP Rajya Sabha MP. Politics is not something new to the Mysuru royal family.

The previous scion, Srikantadatta Narasimha raja Wadiyar, represented Mysuru parliamentary constituency four times and lost once. Srikantadatta mostly remained with Congress, but also had a short stint with BJP. The royal family still commands considerable respect and affection in the old Mysuru region.

—PTI

HDK convinces CN Manjunath to contest for BJP in LS polls

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Noted cardiac surgeon Dr CN Manjunath, former prime minister HD Deve Gowda's son-in-law, took the plunge into politics on Wednesday as BJP announced his candidature from Bengaluru rural constituency in coming Lok Sabha elections.

Manjunath, who met veteran BJP leader BS Yediyurappa on Wednesday, will be taking on incumbent MP DK Suresh, the brother of Deputy Chief Minister and State Congress Chief DK Shivakumar. Kumaraswamy said, "BJP's high command told me, to convince him. They pressured me to ensure that he contests."Kumaraswamy had also said that his sister (Manjunath's wife) is not happy about her husband entering politics. BJP and JD(S) are in an alliance in Karnataka and, according to sources, JD(S) will contest in three seats -- Mandya, Hassan and Kolar -- and an agreement was reached between the two parties to field Manjunath on the BJP symbol. Manjunath headed the state-owned Sri Jayadeva Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences and Research for 17 years before retiring in January this year. Manjunath said: "This will be a hat-trick election for Modi. Under his leadership, the country has gained global reputation in all sectors including the economy. He has always encouraged achievers and specialists." He has worked towards ensuring that medical services reached the poor and downtrodden at low cost.

CN Manjunath **PHOTO: X**

—PTI

'3 sitting BJP MPs, MLAs will join Cong'

BENGALURU,13 MARCH

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Tuesday claimed that three sitting BJP MPs, many sitting BJP MLAs, and a few JD(S) leaders have expressed interest in joining Congress party ahead of Lok Sabha polls.

However, he refused to reveal the names of BJP candidates. "It is a matter of time, wait for a few days, and everything will be out in the open," said Shivakumar. Shivakumar declared that the ruling Congress is confident of winning more than 20 out of the 28 Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka. "I have travelled across the State and have met people, I know the pulse of the people and the leaning of people towards Congress," said Shivakumar.

Reacting to the speculations that BJP has decided to not provide tickets to 10 sitting MPs in upcoming Lok Sabha elections, Shivakumar said, "The very fact that BJP, which had won 27 out of the 28 seats in 2019, is now discarding its 10 sitting MPs and fielding new candidates besides allying with JD(S). Both BJP and JD(S) know they had lost in Assembly polls, which is an indication of the fear of BJP. There is a strong anti-incumbency feeling with people angry at the non-performance of BJP MPs." Regarding the candidature of the noted Cardiologist Dr CN Manjunath said, "I don't know if Dr Manjunath is interested in contesting in Lok Sabha election as a BJP-JD(S) combine candidate from Bengaluru Rural constituency. If he does, he will know that he will lose his reputation. I respect him. We have no problems with Manjunath's candidature in Bengaluru Rural constituency against my brother DK Suresh," said Shivakumar.

Questioning the silence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP high command over Anant Kumar Hegde's remarks he said, "If they really want to condemn, why are they not taking any action against their own MP?" *—Salar News*

Members of CPI(M), AICCTU and other organisations protest against the Central government against CAA notification on Wednesday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

CM to hold Cabinet meeting over CAA today

BENGALURU, 13 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said on Wednesday that the Centre notifying the rules for the Citizenship (Amendment) Act is a "gimmick" keeping Lok Sabha polls in mind, and the State government will take a decision regarding its implementation in the State after going through it.

"We are yet to look into it. After looking into it, we will take a decision. We will discuss it at the Cabinet meeting tomorrow," he said.

The Centre on Monday announced the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, a move that comes four years after the contentious law was passed and paves the way for citizenship to undocumented non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

Earlier in the day, Home Minister G Parameshwara told reporters in Bengaluru the government has not yet discussed the issue of implementation of the CAA in the State, and the Cabinet will take a call on it. "We have not yet discussed it. If the Chief Minister says it has to be discussed and decided in the Cabinet, we will decide it. *—PTI*

Simha's supporters protest over ticket

MYSURU, 13 MARCH

Mysuru witnessed protests on Wednesday as supporters of MP Pratap Simha demanded a BJP ticket for the Mysuru-Kodagu Lok Sabha constituency.

This was amid speculations that Simha is unlikely to get a ticket to contest for a third term. Protesters chanted slogans such as, "Modi for the country and Simha for Mysuru."

Protesters chanted slogans such as, "Modi for the country and Simha for Mysuru" while embarking on a bike rally at the Hinkal flyover. They hailed Simha for the developmental works he has done for the constituency, which they claim had not been done in the last 70 years.

Reportedly, Simha's inability to take local leaders into confidence and allegedly not being on good terms with senior BJP leader BS Yediyurappa, who is a BJP Parliamentary Board member, seem to be reasons for him not getting the ticket.

Talking to reporters here, Simha denied rumours that former chief minister BS Yediyurappa was involved in him not getting the ticket. He credited Yediyurappa for the BJP's robust presence in the State. "Yediyurappa is like Modi for the State," he said.

MP Pratap Simha **PHOTO: PTI**

Simha hit back at Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's remarks about the MP not getting the ticket because his name was tarnished, and pointed out the Chief Minister's electoral defeat in 2018. He reiterated his loyalty to BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and expressed his readiness to accept any decision made by them.

— Salar News

Entire State stands with Modi, says Fadnavis

MANGALURU, 13 MARCH

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis claimed that all the electoral promises of the Congress-ruled government in Karnataka have "failed" and said the entire Karnataka is "standing" with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In an interaction with the reporters, he said, "All the guarantees given by the Siddaramaiah government at the time of elections have failed. Now, people's trust lies only in Modi's guarantee. People believe that Modi's guarantee means 'guarantee ki guarantee'. Entire Karnataka stands with Modi." Replying to a query, he said, " BJP will get an unprecedented victory in the Lok Sabha elections. We will win here with a record victory..." He was in Karnataka on Tuesday. During his visit, he addressed BJP workers at the 'Booth KaryakartharaSamavesha' programme of the Dakshina Kannada Lok Sabha constituency in Mangaluru. *—ANI*

STIR OVER CHILLI PRICES

42 farmers arrested in Byadgi after violent protest

BENGALURU, 12 MARCH

In Haveri 42 farmers have been arrested in connection with the violence that erupted following the drastic price crash of Byadgi red chilli at the Byadgi APMC market. Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara revealed on Wednesday that a team has been dispatched to the Nellore region of Andhra Pradesh to apprehend those individuals who were involved in the violence and fled the scene.

Parameshwara informed that action will be taken against all those who engaged in violence, including those who have escaped and are being tracked down through CCTV footage verification. The authorities are actively working to hold the culprits accountable for their actions.

The violent outbreak occurred on Monday when farmers in Haveri reacted strongly to the sudden plummet in prices of the renowned Byadgi chilli crop at the APMC market. The prices dropped significantly from Rs 20,000 per quintal to Rs 8,000, triggering widespread discontent among

the farmers.

In response to the price declaration, farmers resorted to stone-pelting at the APMC office and set fire to vehicles parked on the premises.

Some protesters even stormed into the office, causing extensive damage by vandalising furniture and shattering glass windows.

—Salar News

Home Minister G Parameshwara informed that action will be taken against all those who engaged in violence **PHOTO: X**

Sanatan Dharma row: Case filed against Udhayanidhi

BHOJPUR, 13 MARCH

A case has been registered against Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) leader and Tamil Nadu minister Udhayanidhi Stalin over his 'eradication' remarks on Sanatana Dharma in Bihar. The Case has been registered under section 298 of the IPC. The Court of Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM), Bhojpur, Arrah has put up the case against DMK leader Udhayanidhi Stalin, for his appearance on 1 April. Section 298 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) states that intentionally hurting someone's religious feelings by words, sounds, gestures, or objects is a criminal offence. Earlier, the Madras High Court refused to issue quo warranto against Tamil Nadu ministers Udhayanidhi Stalin and PK Sekar Babu and DMK MP A Raja in connection with remarks on Sanatan Dharma. On 4 March, Supreme Court questioned Stalin over his remarks calling for the eradication of 'Sanatana Dharma' and told him that he is "not a layman but a minister". *—ANI*

AIADMK, AMMK hold seat-sharing talks with BJP

CHENNAI, 13 MARCH

Expelled AIADMK leader O Panneerselvam and AMMK founder TTV Dhinakaran held late-night seat-sharing talks with BJP for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. The talks that started late on Tuesday extended to the early hours of Wednesday. OPS and Dhinakaran, who had announced joining BJP-led NDA two days ago, were in discussion with a delegation of the saffron party comprising Union Minister G Kishan Reddy and its Tamil Nadu chief K Annamalai among others.

Panneerselvam said NDA coalition was a "mega alliance" and there were chances that "2-3 people (parties)" could seek the same constituency. An amicable decision will be arrived at after talks, he added. *—PTI*

EC will disclose details on electoral bonds in time: CEC

JAMMU, 13 MARCH

The Election Commission (EC) has received details from the State Bank of India (SBI) related to the electoral bonds and will share all relevant information in time, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said here on Wednesday. The assertion comes in the wake of the Supreme Court directing the SBI to submit the details of the electoral bonds purchased since 12 April, 2019 to the EC. SBI is the authorised financial institution to issue the electoral bonds. "The SBI was supposed to submit the data by 12 March. They have given to us the details in time. I will go back and look at the data (and) would definitely disclose it in time," Kumar told reporters here. Kumar reached here on Wednesday to review preparations for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. *—PTI*

Join us if you are being insulted: Uddhav to Gadkari

YAVATMAL, 13 MARCH

Shiv Sena (UBT) Chief Uddhav Thackeray has again asked Union Minister Nitin Gadkari to leave BJP if he is being "insulted", saying Opposition in Maharashtra would ensure his victory in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Gadkari has described Thackeray's invitation as "immature and ridiculous", saying BJP has a system of selecting candidates for the elections and Shiv Sena (UBT) leaders need not worry about the saffron party leaders. Speaking at a rally in Maharashtra's Yavatmal district on Tuesday, Thackeray said people like (former Congress leader) Kripashankar Singh, whom BJP once targeted (over alleged corruption), figured in the saffron party's first list of candidates along with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, but Gadkari's name was missing. Opposition MVA comprises Shiv Sena (UBT), Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP) and Congress. *—PTI*

Gadkari, Goyal in BJP's 2nd list of candidates

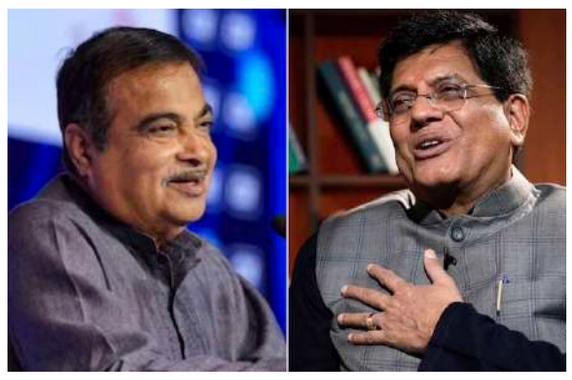
3 ex-CMs, 9 mins, 2 RS MPs, 15 women are handed tickets

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Union Ministers Nitin Gadkari, Piyush Goyal and Anurag Singh Thakur, and three former chief ministers, including Haryana's Manohar Lal Khattar, figured in the BJP's second list of 72 candidates for Lok Sabha elections announced on Wednesday, while the ruling party dropped former Union ministers Sadananda Gowda and Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' from their seats.

Khattar and Goyal will be making their Lok Sabha poll debut from Karnal in Haryana and Mumbai North, respectively. Former Uttarakhand chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat will contest from Haridwar.

BJP Chief Spokesperson Anil Baluni will also be fighting his first Lok Sabha poll as BJP fielded him from Garhwal, replacing former Uttarakhand chief minister Rawat.



BJP declared 20 candidates from Maharashtra including Union Minister Nitin Gadkari (L), and Piyush Goyal (R) **PHOTO: PTI**

Gadkari and Thakur will seek re-election from Nagpur in Maharashtra and Hamirpur in Himachal Pradesh respectively. In the Beed constituency in Maharashtra, Pankaja Munde has replaced her sister and incumbent MP Pritam Munde.

Of the 72 seats for which the party announced its candidates, 20 each were from Maharashtra and Karnataka, seven from Gujarat, six each from Haryana and Telangana, five from Madhya Pradesh, two each from Delhi, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, and one each from Tripura, and Dadar & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu.

In Delhi, BJP has fielded two new candidates -- Harsh Malhotra from East Delhi and Yogendra Chandolia from North West Delhi -- dropping the party's sitting MPs Gautam Gambhir and Hans Raj Hans. With this, the BJP has named candidates for all seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi, dropping six incumbents.

Ashok Tanwar, replaces sitting MP Sunita Duggal in Sirsa in Haryana, while Union ministers Rao Inderjit Singh and Krishan Pal Gurjar will seek re-election from Gurgaon and Faridabad respectively.On 2 March, BJP released its first list of candidates for 195 Lok Sabha seats, announcing that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will contest from Varanasi for a third time.

However, two of them, Bhojpuri singer-actor Pawan Singh and Upendra Rawat, withdrew after their choices sparked controversies. *—PTI*

BJP PITCHES 60 NAMES FOR ARUNACHAL

ITANAGAR, 13 MARCH

BJP on Wednesday announced candidates for all 60 assembly constituencies in Arunachal Pradesh, dropping three ministers and fielding 16 fresh faces.

Home Minister Bamang Felix (Nyapin seat), Industries Minister Tumke Bagra (Aalo West), and Agriculture Minister Tage Taki (Ziro-Hapoli) were denied tickets by the party.

BJP last week announced that Union Minister Kiren Rijiju and Tapir Gao will contest the Lok Sabha elections from Arunachal West and Arunachal East constituencies respectively.

Of the four female candidates nominated by BJP, Nyabi Jini Dirchi (Basar) is a fresh face, while the three others are Tsering Lhamu (Lumla), Dasanglu Pul (Hayuliang) and Chakat Aboh (Khonsa West).

Three Congress MLAs who joined the saffron camp recently were nominated. They are Ninong Ering (Pasighat West), Lombo Tayeng (Mebo) and Wangling Lowangdong (Borduria-Bogapani). *—PTI*

HARYANA FLOOR TEST

Nayab Singh Saini speaks during the special session of the state Assembly in Chandigarh on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Saini govt wins trust vote, Khattar resigns as MLA

CHANDIGARH, 13 MARCH

BJP government led by Nayab Singh Saini on Wednesday won the confidence motion by voice vote in the Haryana Assembly here, a day after he took oath as the new Chief Minister.

Soon after Saini government won the trust vote during a special session of the Assembly, his predecessor Manohar Lal Khattar said he was resigning as a member of the House. This announcement came amid speculation that he may contest the Lok Sabha polls from Karnal.

Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) MLAs who were part of the previous Khattar government, left the House when the trust vote was taken up. JJP had issued a Whip, asking its 10 legislators to remain absent from the Assembly during voting on the confidence motion.

Speaker Gian Chand Gupta put the confidence motion for voting by voice vote which the Saini government won. Former state home minister and senior BJP leader Anil Vij was present in the House.

During the voice vote, besides JJP's 10 MLAs, lone legislator of Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) was also absent from the House. Congress members asked Gupta to conduct voting through secret ballot but he refused saying there was no provision in the rules for the same.

Earlier, Saini moved a motion to seek a vote of confidence in the Assembly. A two-hour discussion took place on the motion.

Saini said, "Our government not only has the trust of the MLAs, but we also have trust of people of Haryana." In the 90-member state Assembly, BJP has 41 members, and it also enjoys the support of six of the seven independents as well as of lone Haryana Lokhit Party MLA Gopal Kanda. The main Opposition Congress has 30 MLAs.

Meanwhile, JJP Chief Ajay Singh Chautala said his party worked with full honesty to fulfil the "gathbandhan (alliance) dharma" over the last four and half years and his party was never power hungry. Chautala said his party had demanded two Lok Sabha seats in Haryana for the upcoming general elections, but was refused by BJP. BJP named Saini as new Chief Minister on Tuesday, hours after the surprise resignation of Khattar. *—PTI*

India to get three semiconductor units

Narendra Modi addresses foundation stone-laying ceremony through video conferencing, in New Delhi on Wednesday **PHOTO: ANI**

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

- **Modi will dedicate India's first Fab facility in Gujarat's Dholera, Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test (OSAT) facilities at Sanand in Gujarat and Morigaon in Assam**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated and addressed the youth in the 'India's Techade: Chips for Viksit Bharat' on Wednesady at 10:30 am via video conferencing. He also laid the foundation stone of three semiconductor projects worth about Rs 1.25 lakh crore with the goal of 'Development of Semiconductors and Display Manufacturing Ecosystems in India'.

The India Semiconductor Mission has been set up by the Government of India to create an end-to-end semiconductor ecosystem to enable India to lead the global semiconductor industry. This initiative is expected to foster employment opportunities for the youth of the country, a press release from the Ministry of Education read.Modi will dedicate India's first Fab facility in Gujarat's Dholera, Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test (OSAT) facilities at Sanand in Gujarat and Morigaon in Assam.

The occasion will witness the participation of students from 1814 institutes, including, all Central Universities, IITs, NITs, IIMs, IISER, IISc and other top institutes where Research, Innovation and STEM disciplines are prominent, the release said.

Apart from live streaming of the event, the HEIs will be conducting seminars/conferences during the day to encourage deliberations on India's Techade vision, India's Semi-Conductor Mission and a roadmap to achieve Viksit Bharat @2047 through research and innovation etc.India's Techade signifies India's dedication to embracing the digital age to ensure sustainable development, create new job opportunities, enhance quality of life, and establish a strong presence in the global technology landscape, the release said.

"It has been the vision of the Prime Minister to position India as a global hub for semiconductor design, manufacturing and technology development, fostering the creation of employment opportunities for the nation's youth," the statement from the Prime Minister's office said. *—ANI*

AP: TDP, YSRCP workers clash

PALNADU, 13 MARCH

- **TDP and YSRCP workers hurled stones and bottles at each other, which resulted in serious injuries**

Several people sustained injuries in clashes between workers of Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP) in Narasaraopet town in Andhra Pradesh.

The incident unfolded on Tuesday evening when TDP candidate Chadalavada Aravinda Babu and party members visited the wards.

TDP and YSRCP workers hurled stones and bottles at each other, which resulted in serious injuries.

The injured members were promptly admitted to a private hospital for treatment. An official said a case will be registered soon, and further details will be announced.

Meanwhile, in the run-up to the elections for the state assembly and Lok Sabha, TDP, BJP, and Jana Sena Party (JSP) sealed a seat-sharing pact in Andhra Pradesh on Monday.TDP Chief and former Andhra Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu announced that his party has "forged a formidable seat-sharing formula" among its alliance partners.According to the statement, BJP will contest from six seats, the TDP from 17 seats and the JSP from two seats for the parliamentary elections.In the assembly elections, BJP will contest from 10 seats, TDP from 144 seats and JSP from 21 seats.

TDP, which was part of BJP-led National Democratic Alliance until 2018, expressed interest in reviving the alliance after suffering a crushing defeat in the 2019 elections. The state has 25 Lok Sabha seats and 175 Assembly seats. *—ANI*

Didi disowns brother after he slams TMC

KOLKATA, 13 MARCH

TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday disowned her younger brother Babun Banerjee after he expressed displeasure over the party re-nominating Prasun Banerjee from Howrah Lok Sabha seat in West Bengal.

Hitting out at her younger brother for speaking out against the party's selection of candidates, Banerjee said, "Before every election, he creates a problem. I don't like greedy people. I don't believe in dynasty politics that I will give him a ticket in elections. I have decided to disown him and cut off all relationships with him."

Babun Banerjee, who is presently in New Delhi, however, denied speculations that he might switch over to BJP, but said he is pondering over contesting "Lok Sabha polls from Howrah seat as an independent."

"I am not happy with the selection of the candidate from Howrah Lok Sabha seat. Prasun Banerjee is not the right choice. Many capable candidates were overlooked. I know Didi (Mamata Banerjee) would not agree with me. But if needed, I will contest as independent from Howrah Lok Sabha seat," he said.

"As long Mamatadi is there, I would never quit the party, and neither would I join any other political party, he added. *—PTI*

Mamata Banerjee and Babun Banerjee **PHOTO: PTI**

50% JOB QUOTA

Cong promises ₹1 lakh annually to poor women

DHULE, 13 MARCH

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday announced five "Mahila Nyay" guarantees, including Rs 1 lakh annually for poor women and 50 per cent reservation in government jobs if his party is voted to power in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

AICC general secretary in charge of communications Jairam Ramesh promised that if Congress comes to power, it will bring a constitutional amendment to do away with the 50 per cent cap on reservations.

Addressing a women's rally in Maharashtra's Dhule district as part of his ongoing 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', Gandhi announced five "Mahila Nyay" guarantees.

Gandhi promised that the central government's share in the budget for ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers, and women working in anganwadis (government-run women and child care centers) and in mid-day meal schemes would be doubled.

A nodal officer would be appointed to educate women about their rights and help in the fight for their cases, he said.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi speaks during the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', at Dondaicha in Maharashtra **PHOTO: PTI**

Savitribai Phule hostels will be set up for women in every district of the country, Gandhi added elaborating on his five guarantees.

"The word 'Nyay' has been added in the second yatra from Manipur to Mumbai after farmers, youth and women told me that violence, hatred is because of injustice," Gandhi said.

Congress' "bhagidari" (participation) proposal means the inclusion of all castes and communities in decision-making and sharing of resources as per their population, he said.

Gandhi also claimed that women had been fooled by the Centre over reservation (in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies) as the bill about it has been passed by Parliament, but its implementation will take 10 years.

Ramesh said the 'adhikar maitri' in each gram panchayat of the country will ensure 2.5 lakh women in rural areas get employment and will educate women about their rights and fight for their causes. *—PTI*

CAA PROTEST RAGES ON

Assam students' union holds 'satyagraha' against CAA

GUWAHATI, 13 MARCH

The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) on Wednesday launched a "satyagraha" across the state protesting the implementation of the controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA). An AASU delegation had gone to New Delhi on Tuesday to pursue the petition against the Act in Supreme Court, while Leader of the Opposition in the Assam assembly Debabrata Saikia filed an interlocutory application in the apex court, seeking a stay on the implementation of the Act.

Several student and non-political indigenous organisations along with Opposition political parties have been opposing CAA, claiming that it violates the provision of the 1985 Assam Accord.The accord called for "detection and deportation" of all people who entered the state from Bangladesh post 24 March, 1971.Patrolling has been intensified in almost all cities and towns of the state, where widespread protests were held in 2019. *—PTI*

All Assam Students' Union members take out a torchlight rally against CAA in Guwahati on Tuesday **PHOTO:ANI**

Cong protests outside Kerala Raj Bhavan

T'PURAM, 13 MARCH

Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee on Wednesday organised a dharna in front of the Raj Bhavan here to protest against the Central government's decision to enforce the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019.

Addressing the dharna, the Leader of the Oppositionin the Assembly, VD Satheesan, alleged that BJP-led government issued the CAA notification to divide the people along communal lines."When Congress was in power at the Centre, we brought several legislations to uplift the lives of the poor. But now when BJP came to power, they enacted laws to divide the people for political purposes," he alleged.

Several leaders of Congress including UDF Convenor, CWC member and Thiruvananthapuram MP Shashi Tharoor, and Attingal MP Adoor Prakash, took part in the dharna. *—PTI*

STOP SPEAKING LIES ABOUT CAA: BJP HITS BACK AT OPPOSITION

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

BJP on Wednesday accused Opposition parties of stoking communal passion by speaking "lies" about the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday said the implementation of CAA ahead of the Lok Sabha polls was "dirty vote bank politics" of BJP. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee asserted that CAA is linked with the National Register of Citizens and that is the reason why she is opposing the new legislation. Also, People's Democratic Party President Mehbooba Mufti appealed to the people o to use their votes sensibly to respond to laws like CAA and not fall into the BJP's trap. *—PTI*

Lyme disease reported in Kerala's Ernakulam

ERNAKULAM, 13 MARCH

Lyme, a disease caused by Borrelia bacteria, has been reported from Koovapady in Ernakulam district of Kerala, said a doctor of a private hospital who treated the patient.Jilse George, Senior Physician at Lisie Hospital, said that the disease was confirmed in a 56-year-old man. The doctor said that the patient's sample tested positive at the Bengaluru unit of the National Institute of Virology.George said the patient was referred to Lisie Hospital with a high-grade fever on 6 December, 2023. He also had a history of pain and swelling in the right knee for two weeks. Neck stiffness was present. A local examination revealed superficial ulcers over the scrotum, he said.He was showing epileptic symptoms. Further tests confirmed that it was Lyme disease, said the doctor. After starting treatment for Lyme disease, his health improved and he was discharged from the hospital on 26 December.The patient's blood was sent to the National Institute of Virology for testing under the direction of the District Health Department. ***—ANI***

2 members of UNLF(P) held in Manipur: Officials

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Two "important" people of the United National Liberation Front (P) have been arrested in a joint operation conducted by the Manipur Police, NIA and CRPF, officials said on Wednesday. They said Thokchom Thoiba, a self-styled Army Chief of the proscribed outfit, and Lieutenant Colonel Laimayum Ingba, the Head of the INT department of the UNLF(P), were arrested in the operation. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) had announced a cash reward on information leading to Thoiba's arrest, the officials said. ***—ANI***

IED blast: Shillong's Punjabi lane settlers seek help

SHILLONG, 13 MARCH

Residents of the disputed Punjabi Lane here have sought the intervention of Union Home Minister Amit Shah into the IED explosion in their locality on 9 March, resulting in one injury. In a letter to Shah, Harijan Panchayat Committee (HPC) Secretary Gurjit Singh said the blast has instilled a sense of fear among the residents. The Sikh community residing in the contested area believes the blast was orchestrated to disrupt negotiations aimed at relocating them to municipal land. Singh emphasised to Shah that the blast undermines the peace efforts. He urged the Home Minister to take immediate action against those issuing threats, asserting that restoring peace requires holding troublemakers accountable. He called upon the Centre to uphold the rule of law and safeguard the rights of all citizens irrespective of ethnicity or religion. ***—PTI***

Kolkata biz man's body found in jute sack

KOLKATA, 13 MARCH

The body of a missing businessman was recovered from underneath a water tank on the outskirts of the city, a police officer said on Wednesday.The body of Bhavo Lakhani, who lived in Ballygunge area here, was found in a jute sack beneath the tank at the residence of his business partner, Anirban Gupta, on Tuesday, the officer said.The body was found during a police raid on Gupta's house, prompted by suspicions from neighbours who noticed sudden construction activity around the tank in Nimta area, on the northern fringes of the city, around 3am, police said. Forensic tests and a post-mortem examination revealed that the deceased had been subjected to physical assault, with visible injury marks on the body, including the head.The officer said that inquiries indicated the accused had borrowed a significant amount of money from the deceased but had failed to repay it over an extended period. ***—PTI***

Ban 23 breeds of ferocious dogs: Centre tells states

The decision comes amid deaths due to pet dog attacks

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

The Central government has directed states to ban the sale and breeding of 23 breeds of ferocious dogs, including Pitbull Terrier, American Bulldog, Rottweiler and Mastiffs, amid rising instances of people dying due to pet dog attacks.

The directive issued to states and Union Territories bars people from keeping as many as 23 breeds of dogs as pets.

In a letter dated 12 March to Chief Secretaries of all states and UTs, the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying also said that these breeds of dogs, which have already been kept as pets, should be sterilised to prevent further breeding.

Flagging serious recent issues of death of human beings due to dog bites by some ferocious breeds of dogs kept as pets, the department said it has received representations from citizens, citizen forums and Animal Welfare Organisations (AWOs) to ban some of the breeds of dogs from keeping them as pets and other purposes.Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying had set up an expert committee under the chairmanship of the Animal Husbandry Commissioner with members from various stakeholder organisations and experts in view of the representations.

The panel has identified 23 breeds of dogs, as ferocious and also dangerous for human lives.

Pitbull Terrier, Tosa Inu, American Staffordshire Terrier, Fila Brasileiro, Dogo Argentino, American Bulldog, Boerboel Kangal, Central Asian Shepherd Dog and Caucasian Shepherd Dog are among the breeds sought to be banned from the Centre.

Other breeds include South Russian Shepherd Dog, Tornjak, Sarplaninac, Japanese Tosa and Akita, Mastiffs, Terriers, Rhodesian Ridgeback, Wolf Dogs, Canario, Akbash Dog, Moscow Guard Dog, Cane Corso and Bandog.

"...the above dog breeds, including crossbreeds, shall be prohibited for import, breedings, selling as pet dogs and other purposes," the letter said, quoting the recommendations of the expert panel.

The Centre's Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying has asked local bodies and state-level departments of animal husbandry not to issue any license or permit for the sale and breeding of banned dog breeds.It has published the Prevention of Cruelty to the Animal (Dog Breeding and Marketing) rules, 2017 and the Prevent of Cruelty to Animal (pet shop) rules, 2018.

In the letter, Joint Secretary in the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying OP Chaudhary said implementation of the rules is vested in local bodies and state animal welfare boards as well as the Department of Animal Husbandry. ***—PTI***

The Centre plans to ban breeding of Pitbull Terrier, Tosa Inu, American Staffordshire Terrier, Boerboel Kangal and Caucasian Shepherd Dog, among others ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

- The Centre's Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying has asked local bodies and state-level departments of animal husbandry not to issue any license or permit for the sale and breeding of banned dog breeds

2021 RECRUITMENT EXAM

Sub-inspector and trainee arrested in R'than paper leak

JAIPUR, 13 MARCH

A sub-inspector and his sister, a trainee officer of the Rajasthan Police, have been arrested in connection with a probe into the alleged leak of question papers for the recruitment of sub-inspectors in 2021, officials said on Wednesday.

Additional Director General of Police and the head of Special Investigation Team V K Singh said Jagdish Siyag, a sub-inspector of 2014 batch, had fixed Varsha as a dummy candidate for his sister Indubala and cousin Bhagwati for the recruitment exam.

Siyag, who was posted at Bharatpur SP office, was arrested on Tuesday. His sister Indubala was arrested the same day, the ADG said, adding that Bhagwati was arrested on 5 March.

The officer said that Varsha took the exam for herself and also appeared as a dummy candidate for Bhagwati and Indubala. While all three cleared the recruitment exam, Varsha did not join the police force but Bhagwati and Indubala did, he said.

Indubala and Bhagwati were undergoing training as sub-inspectors at Rajasthan Police Academy.

Singh said that a total of 15 trainee sub-inspectors and one serving sub-inspector have been arrested in connection with the case so far. ***—PTI***

PHOTO: PIXABAY

- The officer said that Varsha took the exam for herself and also appeared as a dummy candidate for Bhagwati and Indubala. While all three cleared the recruitment exam, Varsha did not join the police force but Bhagwati and Indubala did, he said

Golden langur count increases to 7,396

GUWAHATI, 13 MARCH

The population of endangered golden langur in India has increased to 7,396 from a previous estimation of 6,000, according to a recent survey.

The survey was conducted in various habitats of the animal, covering the Manas Biosphere Reserve and all fragmented forests of north-western Assam.

The survey was jointly conducted by the Primate Research Centre NE India (PRCNE), the forest department, the Bodoland Territorial Council, the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) and the Conservation Himalayas in two phases.

"The team observed 7,720 golden langurs in 706 unique groups and 31 lone males or floating males," Senior Scientist of Primate Research Centre NE India Dr Jihosuo Biswas said.

The survey applied the occupancy framework of the block count method to assess the abundance, spatial distribution and densities of golden langurs, SACON's Principal Scientist Dr H N Kumara said.

The demographic analysis, however, indicates an unstable situation in fragmented habitats. ***—PTI***

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

WATER WOES

Locals collect free water from a government water supply tanker amid the ongoing water crisis, in Hyderabad on Wednesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Bhutan PM to pay 5-day visit to India

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay will pay a five-day visit to India beginning today in his first foreign trip after assuming the charge of the top office in January. Tobgay will hold wide-ranging talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and call on President Droupadi Murmu, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said, announcing the Bhutanese leader's visit from 14 – 18 March.

Tobgay's visit to India against the backdrop of China and Bhutan looking at an expeditious resolution of their festering boundary row that could have implications for India's security interests.

Around five months back, Bhutan's then foreign minister Tandi Dorji held talks with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Beijing.A Chinese readout on the talks said Bhutan firmly abides by the one-China principle and stands ready to work with China for an early settlement of the boundary issue.

New Delhi has been keeping a close eye on the negotiations between Bhutan and China on their boundary row as it could have implications in the Doklam tri-junction.

The India-China stand-off in the Doklam plateau in 2017 even triggered fears of larger conflict. Bhutan had said the area belonged to it and India supported the Bhutanese claim. ***—PTI***

Tshering Tobgay, Narendra Modi ***PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA/ANI***

China says border issue does not mean entirety of bilateral ties

BEIJING, 13 MARCH

China on Wednesday said the Sino-India boundary issue does not represent the entirety of the bilateral ties and called for enhancing mutual trust between the two countries to avoid misunderstanding and misjudgement.

India has been maintaining that its ties with China cannot be normal unless there is peace in the border areas.

Bilateral ties nosedived significantly following the fierce clash in the Galwan Valley in June 2020 that marked the most serious military conflict between the two sides in more than four decades.

Responding to questions on External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's remarks this week that the amassing of troops along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) has "not served either of us well", Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin said, the boundary issue should be placed appropriately in the bilateral ties.

While responding to a query from a Chinese diplomat at the 'Express Adda' on Monday, Jaishankar said, "I think it is in our common interest that we should not have that many forces on the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Wang, in his reply, said both China and India believe an early settlement of the situation on the China-India border serves the common interest of the two sides.

China has stressed multiple times that the boundary question does not represent the entirety of the China-India relations, which should be placed appropriately in the bilateral relations and managed properly, he said.

When pointed out that Jaishankar's comments referred to the resolution of the present standoff in eastern Ladakh where the two countries deployed thousands of troops, while China referred to the overall boundary issue, Wang said, "The two things in nature are the same."

The Indian and Chinese troops are locked in a standoff in certain friction points in eastern Ladakh even as the two sides completed disengagement from several areas following extensive diplomatic and military talks. ***—PTI***

FOREIGN FOOTBALLER RACIALLY ABUSED, BEATEN UP IN KERALA

MALAPPURAM, 13 MARCH

A football player from Ivory Coast was beaten up by a mob of spectators and also allegedly racially abused a few days ago during a soccer match between local clubs in north Kerala, police said on Wednesday.

The incident came to light as a video of the assault went viral on social media and the foreign national lodged a complaint with the Malappuram District Police Chief on Tuesday alleging that he was racially abused and pelted with stones during the match. An FIR was filed on Wednesday against 15 people.

An officer of Areekode police station said that according to videos some of the spectators can be seen making fun of the player and also throwing something at him. Subsequently, he can be seen going up to the spectators and kicking one of them, the officer added.

A complaint has also been received from the person who was allegedly kicked by the player, the officer added.

"Since he is a foreign national, we are giving priority to his complaint," police said. ***—PTI***

AHEAD OF ELECTIONS

Poll officials suspended over 3 voter IDs to 1 man

T'PURAM, 13 MARCH

Ahead of Lok Sabha elections, Kerala Chief Electoral Officer has ordered the suspension of two poll officials after a voter in Beypore town of Kozhikode district was found with three voter identity cards.

This decision comes in the wake of the discovery of three voter ID cards issued to a single individual in Beypore.

Shahir Shahul Hameed, a resident of Beypore, was found to possess three separate voter ID cards. Additionally, the individual found in possession of the duplicate voter ID cards may face imprisonment of up to one year under the same Act.

A show cause notice was issued to the Kozhikode Collector, demanding an explanation for the lapses in oversight.

Chief Electoral Officer Sanjay Kaul said that after preparing the draft voter list, all District Collectors have been directed to carry out strict examination through EROs and BLOs to find out whether names have been added to the voter list by submitting false applications in the same manner. ***—ANI***

J&K POLL DUTY VEHICLES GET GPS TRACKERS

JAMMU, 13 MARCH

In keeping with the directions of the Election Commission, Jammu and Kashmir's election department will procure GPS-enabled tracking systems for 12,500 poll duty vehicles for the parliamentary elections.

GPS control rooms will be established at the offices of district electoral officers and the CEO for real-time tracking and monitoring of the movement of Electronic Voting Machines and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail. ***—PTI***

KERALA HC ON REVIEWS

No movie reviews within 48 hrs of release

KOCHI, 13 MARCH

Amid the ongoing debate on whether or not negative reviews posted on social media adversely affect the collections of a film, the amicus curiae appointed by the Kerala High Court has recommended that films not be reviewed in the first 48 hours of their release.

The report submitted by amicus curiae Shyam Padman contains strict guidelines to prevent "review bombing" and allow viewers to form their own opinion without being influenced by biased reviews.

It is reported that there are many people who do reviews on social media for reward and there are negative reviews against those who are not ready to pay. There is currently a limitation to sue on this as it does not come under the purview of extortion, blackmail etc.

The amicus curiae report has suggested constituting a dedicated portal on cyber cells to receive complaints related to review bombings.It also recommended that reviewers should provide constructive criticism and avoid disrespectful language, personal attacks or derogatory remarks against actors, filmmakers and others. Instead of tearing down the film, constructive criticism should be done.

The report states that legal and ethical standards as well as professionalism should be maintained. Justice Devan Ramachandran instructed to convey the position of the central government in the report.

High Court said that people have started realizing the truth behind negative comments about the films.

The court also said that despite the negative comments, some new films have been successful recently.The amicus curiae submitted guidelines to the court, recommending that reviewers including vloggers should avoid reviews of the film in the first 48 hours of its release.

The court also said that it is understood that people have realized that many of the negative comments are fake or have some purpose.

There have been complaints that vloggers are intentionally degrading newly released movies to get paid.

Kochi City Police registered its first complaint on 25 October, 2023 by the director of Rahel Makan Kora who alleged there were deliberate efforts to degrade the film on different social media platforms.

Police registered the complaint after receiving direction from Kerala High Court. ***—ANI***

It is reported that there are many who do reviews for reward and negative reviews against those who are not ready to pay ***PHOTO: FB***

Delhi HC issues notice on Umar Khalid's plea

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Delhi High Court on Wednesday issued notice on Umar Khalid's plea challenging trial court order dropping off attempt to murder charges against two people accused of firing at him at Constitution Club in New Delhi on August 2018.

Khalid has moved Delhi High Court against an order passed by the Patiala House Court on 6 December, 2023, dropping the attempt to murder charges against Darwesh Shahpur and Naveen Dalal.The trial court discharged the accused noting that Dalal pointed a Gun at Khalid but no shot was fired. When two shots were fired it was towards the ground not aimed at anyone.

This case pertains to an incident occured outside the constitution club at New Delhi on August 13, 2018 when he went there to attend an event ' Khauf Se Azadi' organised by an organisation United Against Hate (UAH).

In this case Delhi police arrested Darwesh Shahpur and Naveen Dalal.

An FIR was lodged by Delhi Police. ***—ANI***

Umar Khalid ***PHOTO: PTI***

PROTEST AGAINST UNEMPLOYMENT

NSUI activists attempt to cross a security barricade during a protest against unemployment and other demands, in Bhubaneswar, on Wednesday. ***PHOTO: PTI***

India has 6.7 million children without food

India accounted for almost half of zero-food children in this study ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

India has ranked shamefully high in a study calculating the prevalence of children aged 6-23 months who have not eaten anything over a 24-hour period, across 92 low- and middle-income countries (LMIC). In absolute numbers, the paper found India had the most 'zero-food' children at 6.7 million — almost half of all the zero-food children in the surveys.

Zero-food children are the ones who did not consume any animal milk, formula or solid or semisolid food during the last 24 hours.

At approximately six months of age, breastfeeding is no longer sufficient to provide the child with necessary nutrition. Introducing solid or semisolid foods along with breastfeeding is essential for fulfilling the nutritional needs of early childhood, playing a pivotal role in crucial aspects of child growth and development.

With 19.3 per cent 'zero-food' children, India was third highest globally after West African countries Guinea (21.8 per cent) and Mali (20.5 per cent). Nigeria had the second-highest number of zero-food children (962,000), followed by Pakistan (849,000).

The research, published in journal JAMA Network Open on 12 February, 2024, looked at 276,379 babies aged six to 23 months in 92 LMICs. During this crucial phase of growth and development, children are especially susceptible to under nutrition.

The researchers gathered data from demographic and health surveys (DHS) and multiple indicator cluster (MICS) surveys conducted from 20 May, 2010, to 27 January, 2022. Of the total sample size, 51.4 per cent of the sample were boys. For India, National Family Health Survey's 2019-2021 data was used.

DHS and MICS surveys used standardised questions on feeding practices, covering common and country-specific solid or semisolid foods. Despite variations, they generally included similar food groups. The analysis treated milk and infant formula as food items, excluding breastfeeding and other liquid feedings, except in a sensitivity analysis.

The combined data showed there were 13.9 million children who had not eaten anything in the studied countries or 10.4 per of the sample. The prevalence of zero-food instances differed by regions, with the highest rates seen in South Asia (15.7 per cent) and west and central Africa (10.5 per cent).

Latin America and the Caribbean had the lowest prevalence and number of zero-food children, at 1.9 per cent, or 120,000 children. East Asia and the Pacific had the second-lowest prevalence, at 2.9 per cent.

However, more than 99 per cent of the children who experienced zero-food situations had been breastfed, the paper found. This suggests that nearly all these children received some calories even during the 24-hour period when they did not receive other food sources.

High rates of children experiencing zero-food situations in certain countries indicate the necessity for focused interventions to enhance feeding practices for infants and young children. This is crucial to ensure optimal nutrition during a critical period of their development.

Nigeria, Pakistan, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo also showed substantial numbers of zero-food children, emphasising the need for targeted interventions in these countries. Meanwhile, highly populated countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines had relatively many zero-food children, despite relatively lower prevalence rates.

This highlighted the importance of considering both prevalence and absolute numbers when designing interventions, even in countries with apparently lower risk. The researchers also found differences according to household wealth.

There was a noticeable pattern in the prevalence of children experiencing zero-food situations based on their age across different regions too. For instance, in the total sample, 20 per cent of children aged 6 to 11 months had zero food, which decreased to 6.6 per cent for those aged 12 to 17 months and further to 4.1 per cent for those aged 18 to 23 months.

The study pinpointed key areas where policies and programmes can intervene to enhance the nutritional well-being of children who experience zero-food situations. It is crucial to tackle the socioeconomic and environmental factors that contribute to food insecurity, it added.

"Strategies should include enhancing access to nutritious foods, improving maternal and caregiver knowledge about appropriate feeding practices and strengthening health systems to ensure the availability of necessary resources and support. The design and implementation of interventions should be context specific, accounting for cultural practices and local challenges," the paper read.

The researchers, however, warned that it used data reported by individuals in household surveys. "Parents or caregivers might not accurately remember what the child ate in the 24 hours before the survey, introducing a recall bias that could result in either underestimating or overestimating the prevalence of zero-food instances," it said.

—Downtoearth

SALAR سالار

Sarfaraz Khan: A cricketer's long journey to Test captaincy

Batting for nearly 10 hours at Mumbai's Cross Maidan, Sarfaraz Khan first stole the limelight as a schoolboy in 2009 when he rewrote the history of the famed ground in the Indian metropolis renowned for producing great batters.

The then-12-year-old recorded the highest-ever score in the Harris Shield, a tournament known as the Holy Grail of school cricket in the city.

Dressed in traditional cricket whites – loose-fitting white shirt and track pants – the strongly-built boy from Kurla, an eastern lower middle-class suburb of the bustling city, scored 439 runs and became a national sensation.

Playing for Rizvi Springfield in the Under-16 category, Sarfaraz hit 56 fours and 12 sixes in his innings as he broke Ramesh Nagdev's 46-year-old record of 427 not out. On his way, Sarfaraz went past the score of another Ramesh – the 346 runs scored by cricket legend Sachin Ramesh Tendulkar in 1988.

Following Sarfaraz's record-breaking achievement, local newspapers and national media were quick to wonder if he would be "the next Tendulkar", but the prodigy slid into obscurity.

For years, Sarfaraz sweated it out on Mumbai's maidans (grounds) as he forged an impressive career in first-class cricket awaiting a call from the national selectors.

But as seasons passed and opportunities seemingly slipped through his grasp, Sarfaraz found himself in the shadows. He watched Shubman Gill, Prithvi Shaw and Yashasvi Jaiswal – batters who came after him – take the big stage.

After spending a decade waiting for his moment, the gutsy batter finally found himself donning the Indian Test cap last month.

On 15 February, 14 years since that record-breaking outing in the maidans, Sarfaraz made his Test debut against England in Rajkot, Gujarat.

Sarfaraz was given the nod by the selectors after absences and injuries finally forced their hand.

Following a round of applause from his teammates as he received the cap from ex-captain Anil Kumble, Sarfaraz rushed to his father and wife to celebrate.

Realising the arduous journey to the top was finally over, Naushad, Sarfaraz's father and coach, kissed the cap and burst into tears.

Everyone is talking about him'

On the day of his debut, Sarfaraz had to wait for four hours to score his first runs as he went out to bat at number six.

In the first innings, the 26-year-old scored a half-century and looked set for his maiden Test hundred, but was run out for 62 after a communication mix-up with Ravindra Jadeja.

In the second innings, he remained 68 not out, becoming only the fourth Indian cricketer to score twin fifties on his Test debut, as India comfortably won the match to take a 2-1 series lead.

As a schoolboy, Sarfaraz often tested himself against bowlers much older than him and by the age of 17, he was playing in the Ranji Trophy, India's first-class championship, for Mumbai.

He would go on to represent India at the 2014 and 2016 ICC Under-19 World Cups and make his debut in the Indian Premier League (IPL).

But he had to endure a 10-year wait before his first Test call-up – playing 46 matches in first-class cricket with an impressive average of 70.

The magic of maidans

Sarfaraz is the latest success story to emerge out of Mumbai's iconic maidans, which have produced some of India's best batters such as the legendary Tendulkar, current Test captain Rohit Sharma, former skipper Sunil Gavaskar, and batting great Vijay Merchant.

The maidans are the home of cricket in Mumbai.

It is on the red soil of those dusty fields that dreams take root and aspirations soar, as young boys hone their skills from early morning to evening, often under the scorching sun.

Unbelievable commitment

Fitness issues, a failed move from Mumbai to the Uttar Pradesh team in domestic cricket and injuries set Sarfaraz back for some time before delivering strong performances in the past four domestic seasons.

Deepak Lotlikar, ground in charge of the Karnataka Sporting Association at Cross Maidan, has witnessed Sarfaraz's struggle from up close. Sarfaraz went on to play the fourth and fifth Tests and lifted the series winners' trophy last week.

It remains to be seen whether his 200 runs in three innings will keep him in the Test side once the likes of Virat Kohli and KL Rahul return, but Sarfaraz has done enough to inspire young cricketers at Cross Maidan.

For 10-year-old Mudassar Shaikh, Sarfaraz is already a hero. "I hope I can be like Sarfaraz one day," he said with a smile. *—Al Jazeera*

Sarfaraz went on to play the fourth and fifth Tests and lifted the series winners' trophy. He has done enough to inspire young cricketers ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

Why are people in Ladakh protesting against the government?

More than four years ago, when Ladakh was carved out from Kashmir, the regional capital, Leh, erupted in joy. A majority of its voters cast ballots for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party for fulfilling a long-term demand.

They had accused the Kashmir-based leadership of discriminating against the Buddhist-majority Himalayan region, known for its snow-capped peaks and lush grasslands. But the jubilation in Leh did not last long.

The government's decision to run the territory directly from New Delhi has raised concerns about the region's democratic marginalisation, lack of say in developmental projects and militarisation of the ecologically sensitive Himalayan region, located at an altitude of 18,800ft.

On 6 March, hundreds of people assembled in Leh after the latest round of talks with the Centre yielded no results. Ladakh activist Sonam Wangchuk launched a 21-day fast unto death to demand a devolution of power and constitutional protections to fight against what he said is an onslaught of outside influence that threatens the loss of their tribal identity.

Who is behind the latest protest?

In August 2019, the Centre scrapped the special status granted to Kashmir and bifurcated it into two federally administered regions – Jammu and Kashmir as well as Ladakh.

But Ladakh's leaders said they have lost political representation in the current bureaucratic setup and have little say in the development projects announced by the New Delhi-run administration. New laws passed by the administration that allows outsiders to settle and start businesses in the region has also alarmed locals.

Two autonomous bodies formed in the mid-1990s and early 2000s for self-governance in Leh and Kargil have now been stripped of much of their powers. The local bodies known as the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils had a key role in decisions related to healthcare, land and other local issues in the Leh and Kargil districts.

People have been taking to the streets to protest. Wangchuk held a five-day fast in January last year by camping in sub-zero temperatures, highlighting the threat posed to the pristine environment by planned mining and industrial projects.

Ladakh activist Sonam Wangchuk launched a 21-day fast unto death to demand a devolution of power and constitutional protections of their tribal identity ***PHOTO: FACEBOOK/SONAM WANGCHUK***

On 3 February, thousands of residents gathered in Leh, the main city in Ladakh, under the leadership of the Leh Apex Body and Kargil Democratic Alliance, which represent the aspirations of Buddhist-majority Leh and Muslim-majority Kargil.

They are demanding statehood for Ladakh, a tribal status under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, which allows the formation of autonomous administrative divisions with some legislative, judicial and administrative autonomy within a state. They make laws on important things like land, forests, water and mining – crucial for a region in which 97 per cent of the population is tribal.

Nine rounds of talks between New Delhi and leaders from Ladakh have ended in deadlock. The last meeting held on 4 March yielded no concrete results.

For a long time, the majority Buddhist population in Leh had resented the centre of power in the region being based in Srinagar, Kashmiri's capital 420km away. When India revoked Kashmir's semi-autonomy and divided the region, Wangchuk said he expected a legislature for Ladakh to have a hand in decision-making. But that did not happen. Its government is led by a lieutenant governor, who is appointed by President. Under the current arrangement, Ladakh's people feel more underrepresented than ever.

Before the removal of Kashmir's semi-autonomy, outsiders were prevented from buying land and settling in the region. But now there is growing apprehension in Ladakh about a potential demographic shift and damage to the fragile ecosystem. Kashmiris have also expressed similar concerns.

The extension of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution to Ladakh, its residents said, would safeguard them from demographic changes and resource exploitation by outsiders. Even local BJP leaders are backing the demands.

"We stand with the people, and we are also demanding safeguards under the constitution," Nawang Samstan, a Leh BJP leader, said.

What are the environmental concerns?

Ladakh is known for its glaciers and glacial lakes, which are a major source of water for the region. The Himalayan glaciers along with the river basins they feed are called the "water tower of Asia". They are among the few frozen freshwater resources in the world.

However, the climate change-induced retreat of glaciers and changing weather patterns have made the region water-stressed, which residents said threatens their future. They said increasing numbers of tourists have also put pressure on its limited resources.

In the peak season in summer, tourists outnumber the 2,74,000 locals. In 2022, 4,50,000 tourists visited Ladakh in the first eight months of the year. The government's plans to boost tourism and exploit the region's natural resources have alarmed residents.

Seven hydropower projects have been proposed, and several industrial groups have shown interest in exploring the region rich in minerals such as borax, gold, granite, limestone and marble.

Bids have also been solicited for solar projects while the Ladakh government has sought permission.

In the past three years, India has built military infrastructure, such as roads and bridges and acquired land for military purposes amid tensions with China caused by a territorial dispute. Locals who have lost land said they feel vulnerable.

Why have people from Kargil joined protests?

Kargil, about 200km west of Leh, wanted to be part of Kashmir when the region was divided and has accused the government in Leh of political and financial discrimination.

Over the past three years Leh and Kargil have joined forces in move many Ladakhi analysts consider unprecedented.

Overcoming religious and political divides, leaders now uniting for "a greater cause", which Wangchuk described as "a fight for Ladakhi identity".

—Al Jazeera

2 killed, 26 injured in explosion at eatery in China

BEIJING, 13 MARCH

A deadly suspected gas leak explosion ripped through an eatery in north China's Hebei province on Wednesday, killing at least two people and injuring 26 others. The blast rocked a fried chicken shop in Yanjiao township in the city of Sanhe, close to Beijing. It is suspected to have been caused by a gas leak. Two people were killed and 26 others were injured from the explosion, China Daily reported. Rescue workers have rushed to the site immediately, state-run Xinhua news agency reported The blast rocked the building at around 8 am (local time) on Wednesday in Yanjiao town in Sanhe, causing damage to the building and several vehicles. Video footage of the explosion site showed red flames and plumes of smoke, with debris strewn across the nearby road. Firefighters are currently on site, managing the situation, the report said. The fire department had sent 36 vehicles and 154 personnel to the scene. *—PTI*

Many being held hostage in a bus in Rio de Janeiro

RIO DE JANEIRO, 13 MARCH

Several passengers are being held hostage in a bus in Rio de Janeiro, and two were injured from gunshots, Brazilian police said Tuesday. An elite police team is currently negotiating at the scene, they added. The bus is parked inside the Sao Cristovao terminal, in the city centre. Police cars and ambulances could be seen waiting near the bus, while thousands of passengers were stranded waiting for information on scheduled travel. People interviewed on Brazilian TV news channel Globo News said they heard gunshots in the terminal. The two wounded people were sent to a nearby hospital, the police statement said. *—AP*

Rishi Sunak forced to defend party after 'racist' remarks

LONDON, 13 MARCH

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak was on Wednesday forced to defend the governing Conservative Party even as he admitted one of the party's biggest donor's comments targeted at an Opposition Labour Party MP were "racist". During Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) in the House of Commons, Sunak referenced his Indian heritage as he defended his government amid intense pressure over wealthy businessman Frank Hester's reported remarks in a 2019 meeting that Labour MP Diane Abbott makes you "want to hate all black women". In a separate meeting, Hester – who has donated GBP 10 million to the Tories in the past year – said Abbott "should be shot". "The alleged comments were wrong, they were racist and he has rightly apologised for them and that remorse should be accepted," Sunak told members of Parliament. "There is no place for racism in Britain and the government that I lead is living proof of that," he said. *—PTI*

'PTI conspiring to get GSP+ status withdrawn'

ISLAMABAD, 13 MARCH

Jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party has asked the European Union to revoke Pakistan's Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) Plus status and was conspiring to "destroy" its economy, the new Interior Minister Attaullah Tarar said on Wednesday. The GSP+ serves as a special incentive arrangement to promote good governance and sustainable development by facilitating trade. Pakistan was accorded the status in 2014 which has now been extended until 2027. The country enjoys duty-free or minimum duty on exports to the European market. *—PTI*

President Joe Biden meets with Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson in the Oval Office of the White House **PHOTO: AP**

Biden, Trump set for poll rematch

Both of them win party nominations

WASHINGTON, 13 MARCH

US President Joe Biden and his predecessor Donald Trump are set for a bitter election rematch in November after they secured their parties' presidential nominations with impressive wins in another round of key primaries.

Biden, 81, won the Democratic presumptive nomination on Tuesday after easily clinching the presidential primaries in Georgia, as the number of delegates in his kitty crossed the halfway mark of 3,933 pledged delegates. A total of 1,968 delegates were required to win the Democratic nomination.

Four states -- Georgia, Hawaii, Mississippi, Washington -- one American territory and Democrats living abroad held their primaries on Tuesday.

Trump would formally be declared the party's nomination during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in August. Trump, 77, reached the 1,215 delegates necessary with an allocation of delegates from Washington state.

Trump will be officially nominated at the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee this July. He will lead the Republican Party in a third consecutive presidential election after clinching the nomination Tuesday. Their rematch, long anticipated, but hardly clamoured for, is broadly expected to mirror the 2020 campaign, though Trump will run this time under the spectre of 91 felony charges.

Trump is scheduled to become the first former American president to go on trial in a criminal case on 25 March in New York, where he faces charges he falsified business records to hide hush money payments to a porn star.

Other charges are related to allegations that he plotted to overturn his 2020 election defeat; played a lead role in the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the US Capitol and illegally took classified documents from the White House.

It would be the first presidential rematch since 1956. The last presidential rematch came in 1956 when Republican President Dwight D Eisenhower again defeated Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic opponent he had four years prior.

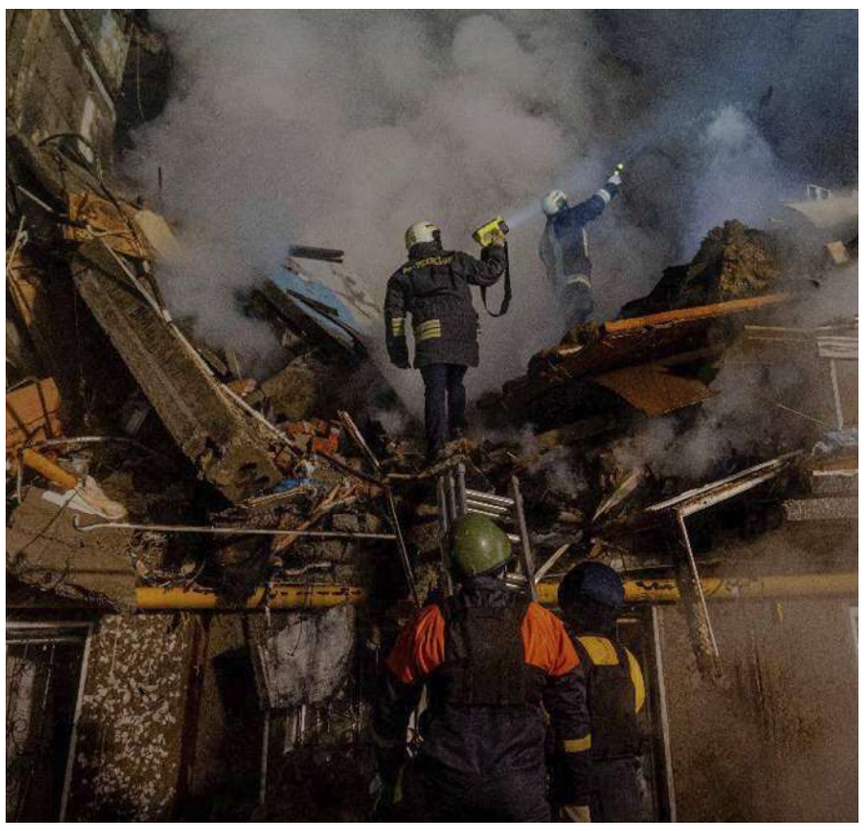
Biden defeated Trump in the 2020 November elections, an outcome still challenged by the Republican leader. Biden has faced only nominal opposition to become the Democratic nominee.

Trump has defeated several Republicans in primary elections, including Indian-origin former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis. Other candidates, including Trump's former vice president, Mike Pence, dropped out months ago for lack of voter support.

Biden said he is honoured to become his party's presumptive nominee and warned of another Trump presidency.

Vice President Kamala Harris celebrated Biden securing the delegates needed to clinch his party's nomination on Tuesday and forecast how the president's campaign will look to take the fight to Trump in the general election. *—PTI*

PLUMES OF SMOKE



In this photo provided by the Ukrainian Emergency Service on Wednesday emergency services personnel work at an apartment building destroyed by a Russian attack in Sumy, Ukraine **PHOTO: PTI**

Japan's first private rocket explodes

TOKYO, 13 MARCH

A Japanese first privately developed rocket, 'Kairos', exploded seconds after lift-off from a spaceport in western Japan, following its launch on Wednesday, reported Kyodo News.

The incident was captured on a live stream video, showing the remains falling onto a nearby mountainous area and into the sea. It further showed fragments of the rocket lying on the ground, as fire hoses attempted to extinguish a large fire. The Tokyo-based startup 'Space One' failed to become Japan's first private firm to put a satellite into orbit when its 18-meter-long solid-fuel Kairos rocket exploded, The Japan Times reported. Following the explosion, local firefighters were dispatched to the scene, Kyodo News reported. There have been no reports of casualties so far, according to the police. Moreover, the company said "flight termination measures" had been implemented.

The launch was initially scheduled for Saturday but was delayed after the company discovered the presence of a ship in a section of the ocean it had designated as needing to be empty for safety. According to the Cabinet Satellite Intelligence Center, the satellite on board the rocket was meant to be able to perform some of the functions of an existing government satellite in monitoring military facilities in North Korea.

Space One's Kairos rocket explodes **PHOTO: PTI**

Space One, established in 2018, seeks to commercialize space delivery services by lowering costs and offering rocket launches at high frequency, as reported by Kyodo News.

Space One was set up by Canon Electronics Inc., IHI Aerospace Co., Shimizu Corp. and the government-owned Development Bank of Japan. *—ANI*

'Philippines ignored S China Sea deal'

BEIJING, 13 MARCH

China says the Philippines ignored proposals it put forward to "manage" their dispute in the South China Sea.

An unnamed senior Chinese official told news outlet the Manila Times that the deal was "met with inaction by the Marcos administration". President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said they did not reject the deal, but said it stood on a "questionable" premise.

The South China Sea is at the centre of a territorial dispute between China, the Philippines and other countries. But tensions between Manila and Beijing have sharply escalated in recent months. At the heart of it is a decaying ship on Second Thomas Shoal that the Philippines have purposely marooned to reinforce its claim in the shoal.

Routine missions to bring food and essentials to a handful of Filipino soldiers on the ship named Sierra Madre has resulted in encounters between the Philippine Coast Guard escorts and the China Coast Guard. *—BBC News*

US House is likely to pass a bill that could ban TikTok

WASHINGTON, 13 MARCH

A bill that could lead to a ban of the popular video app TikTok in the United States is expected to pass the House on Wednesday as lawmakers act on concerns that the company's ownership structure is a threat to national security.

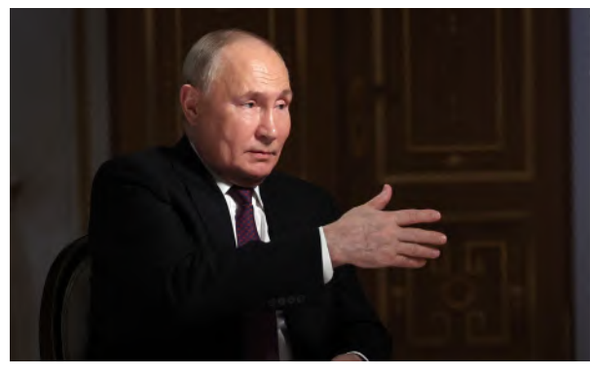
The bill would require the Chinese firm ByteDance to divest from TikTok and other applications it owns within six months of the bill's enactment or those apps would be prohibited.

The lawmakers contend that ByteDance is beholden to the Chinese government, which could demand access to the data of TikTok's consumers in the US any time it wants.

The worry stems from a set of Chinese national security laws that compel organisations to assist with intelligence gathering.

House passage of the bill would only be the first step. The Senate would also need to pass the measure for it to become law, and lawmakers in that chamber indicated it would undergo a thorough review. *—AP*

PUTIN WARNS WEST



Russian President Vladimir Putin gestures while speaking during an interview in Moscow on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

'Russia is ready for nuclear war if threatened'

MOSCOW, 13 MARCH

President Vladimir Putin said that Russia is ready to use nuclear weapons if there is a threat to its statehood, sovereignty or independence, voicing hope that the US would refrain from actions that could trigger a nuclear conflict.

Putin's statement was another blunt warning to the West ahead of a presidential vote this week in which he's all but certain to win another six-year term. In an interview with Russian state television released early Wednesday, Putin described US President Joe Biden as a veteran politician who fully understands possible dangers of escalation, and said that he doesn't think that the world is heading to a nuclear war.

At the same time, he emphasized that Russia's nuclear forces are in full readiness and "from the military-technical viewpoint, we're prepared." Putin said that in line with the country's security doctrine, Moscow is ready to use nuclear weapons in case of a threat to "the existence of the Russian state, our sovereignty and independence."

The Russian leader has repeatedly talked about his readiness to use nuclear weapons since launching the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

The most recent such threat came in his state-of-the-nation address last month, when he warned the West that deepening its involvement in the fighting in Ukraine would risk a nuclear war.

Asked in the interview if he has ever considered using battlefield nuclear weapons in Ukraine, Putin responded that there has been no need for that. He also voiced confidence that Moscow will achieve its goals in Ukraine and held the door open for talks, emphasizing that Russia will hold onto its gains and would seek firm guarantees from the West.

"It shouldn't be a break for the enemy to rearm but a serious talk involving the guarantees of security for the Russian Federation," he said. Putin said that a recent spike in Ukrainian drone attacks deep inside Russia is part of efforts to derail the country's three-day presidential election, which starts Friday and which he is set to win by a landslide, relying on the tight control over Russia's political scene he has established during his 24-year rule. *—PTI*

EU says starvation being used as a weapon in Gaza

GAZA CITY, 13 MARCH

Starvation is being used as a weapon of war in Gaza, the EU's foreign policy chief has claimed.

Josep Borrell described the lack of aid entering the territory as a "manmade" disaster. A Spanish ship carrying desperately needed food supplies has left Cyprus for Gaza, but the UN says this cannot replace the delivery of aid by land.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has meanwhile vowed to press on with an offensive in southern Gaza. The quickest, most effective way to get aid into the territory is by road, but aid agencies say Israeli restrictions mean a fraction of what is needed is getting in.

Attention has instead shifted towards alternative routes including sea and air drops. On Tuesday, a UN World Food Programme convoy used a land route to deliver aid to northern Gaza for the first time in three weeks.

The trucks used an Israeli military road running along Gaza's border fence, Jamie McGoldrick, UN aid coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, told Reuters. Enough food for 25,000 people was delivered to Gaza City, with WFP spokesperson Shaza Moghraby saying they were hoping to "scale up" deliveries, but "need access to be regular and consistent".

The quickest, most effective way to get aid into the territory is by road **PHOTO: EPA**

- Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has meanwhile vowed to press on with an offensive in southern Gaza. The quickest, most effective way to get aid into the territory is by road

Israel says it is not to blame for Gaza's food shortages as it is allowing aid through two crossings in the south. But addressing the UN Security Council in New York on Tuesday, Mr Borrell said the humanitarian crisis in the territory was as a result of a lack of viable land routes.

"We are now facing a population fighting for their own survival," he said. "Humanitarian assistance needs to get into Gaza, and the European Union is working as much as we can in order to make it possible. *—BBC News*

OUTSIDE HOME

Navalny's ex-chief of staff attacked in Lithuania

VILNIUS, 13 MARCH

Late Russian Opposition leader Alexey Navalny's former chief of staff, Leonid Volkov, was attacked outside his house in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius, reported CNN, citing Navalny's spokesperson. Volkov, who is also a Russian opposition activist, was attacked on Tuesday near his house.

Navalny's spokesperson, Kira Yarmysh, said, "Leonid Volkov has just been attacked outside his house. Someone broke a car window and sprayed tear gas in his eyes, after which the attacker started hitting Leonid with a hammer."

Ivan Zhdanov, the director of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, said that Volkov was attacked "near the house" and "they hit his legs with a hammer and hit his arms." Images shared by Zhdanov showed Volkov with a swollen face and a bloodied leg, reported CNN.

Moreover, shattered glass and blood were seen next to a car in another picture. Following the incident, Volkov was taken to the hospital, Zhdanov said in a social media post.

Lithuanian foreign minister Gabrielius Landsbergis, in a post on X, said that the authorities are investigating the attack. "Perpetrators will have to answer for their crime," Landsbergis said, describing the attack as "shocking."

The attack comes days before Russia's presidential election, CNN reported. Volkov, who had served as chairman of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation until 2023, dismissed the elections in February as a "circus," saying that they were meant to signal Putin's overwhelming mass support.

"You need to understand what the March 'elections' mean for Putin. They are a propaganda effort to spread hopelessness" among the electorate, Volkov said.

Late Russian Opposition leader Alexey Navalny's former chief of staff, Leonid Volkov, was attacked with hammer **PHOTO: PTI**

Due to security reasons, Volkov has lived outside Russia for several years. However, in the past, he has faced multiple politically motivated charges in Russia, as reported by CNN. *—ANI*

Nepal PM wins third vote of confidence

KATHMANDU, 13 MARCH

Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' on Wednesday secured a vote of confidence in Parliament, as Himalayan country struggled to maintain political stability due to the frequent shifting of alliances.

Prachanda, 69, a former guerilla leader belonging to Communist Party of Nepal -- the third largest party in the House of Representatives --received 157 votes in the 275-member lower house. 268 MPs were present during the voting. A total of 110 votes were cast against him while one lawmaker abstained from voting. Prachanda needed 138 votes to win the trust vote, his third since assuming charge in December 2022.

According to provisions, a Prime Minister has to take a vote of confidence after an ally withdraws support to the ruling coalition. Nepali Congress is the largest party in the HoR.

Prachanda's new political alliance is with Communist Party of Nepal led by former prime minister KP Sharma Oli, who was regarded as a top critic of the Maoist leader. In the past few decades, three big parties —Nepali Congress, CPN-UML and Maoist Centre — have ruled the country turn by turn, forever changing coalitions and partners at their convenience. *—PTI*

Gold plunges Rs 400; silver plummets Rs 600

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Gold prices plunged Rs 400 to Rs 65,950 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid weak trends in the overseas markets, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal had closed at Rs 66,350 per 10 grams in the previous trade.Silver also plummeted Rs 600 to Rs 75,300 per kg. In the previous close, it had settled at Rs 75,900 per kg. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 65,950 per 10 grams, down by Rs 400 from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,160 per ounce, down by USD 17 from the previous close. Gold prices fell on Wednesday as higher-than-expected US inflation data dashed market hopes of a US Federal Reserve's shift toward monetary policy easing in the upcoming months, Gandhi added. Silver was also quoting lower at USD 24.22 per ounce, while it had ended at USD 24.44 per in the previous trade. *—PTI*

Rupee falls 5 paise to settle at 82.85 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 13 MARCH

The rupee declined by 5 paise to settle at 82.85 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, tracking a broad-based selloff in domestic markets. Forex traders said the rupee is likely to trade with a slightly negative bias on recovery in the greenback and concerns over elevated crude oil prices. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 82.82 and witnessed an intra-day low of 82.91 and a high of 82.82 against the greenback during the trading session. The local unit finally settled at 82.85 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a loss of 5 paise from its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee consolidated in a narrow range and closed 5 paise lower at 82.80 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.04 per cent.*—PTI*

Compressed bio gas plants to be set up in Raipur, Bhilai

RAIPUR, 13 MARCH

An MoU was signed on Wednesday between BPCL, Chhattisgarh Biofuel Development Authority and municipal corporations of Raipur and Bhilai for production of Compressed Bio Gas (CBG) in Chhattisgarh, officials said. As per the pact, BPCL- a central PSU, will set up CBG plants in Raipur and Bhilai with an investment of around Rs 100 crore and the capacity of each plant will be 100-150 tonne per day. The MoU was signed in the presence of Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai and Deputy CM Arun Sao here at the former's official residence, they said. *—PTI*

India to be among top 5 markets for Decathlon in 5 yrs

PARIS, 13 MARCH

India is a "big priority" market for Decathlon, and the French sports retailer expects the country to be among its top five global markets within the next five years, helped by expansion of store network and increased local sourcing, according to a top company official. Decathlon, as part of its growth plans, will add 10 new stores every year in India, while accelerating online sales and also increasing local sourcing to over 90 per cent in the next five years from the current average of 60 per cent, its Chief Retail & Countries Officer Steve Dykes said. This move would help Decathlon become more competitive in the fast-growing Indian sports and athleisure segment and increase exports to global markets from its Indian manufacturing facility, he said. For the financial year ended 31 March, 2023, Decathlon India's sales were at Rs 3,995 crore, registering a 37 per cent growth. *—PTI*

Govt moots bill to curb anti-competitive acts

This will have major impact on Google, Apple, Amazon

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

To identify these large digital players, the panel has recommended two test basis *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

In a significant move, a government-appointed panel has proposed ex-ante competition regulations for big tech players to ensure proactive monitoring of their behaviours and curb any possible unfair business practices.

The recommendations of the Committee on Digital Competition Law comes at a time when there are concerns about anti-competitive practices in the digital space and could have significant impact on big tech players.

The panel has come out with a detailed report as well as the draft Digital Competition Bill (DCB), saying that the bill should apply to a pre-identified list of core digital services that are susceptible to concentration.

The list should be drawn based on the Competition Commission of India's (CCI) enforcement experience, market studies, and emerging global practices.

For violations, the penalty could be up to 10 per cent of a company's global turnover.

According to the report of the panel, chaired by Corporate Affairs Secretary Manoj Govil, there should be an "ex-ante legislation specifically applicable to large digital enterprises, to supplement the Competition Act".

Currently, the Competition Act primarily envisages an ex-post framework of intervention wherein the CCI intervenes after the occurrence of an anti-competitive conduct.

To identify these large digital players, the panel has recommended two test basis -- companies significant financial strength and significant spread.

Based on these tests, the companies need to do a self-assessment and report it to the CCI if they fall within the same.

This will have a major impact on the big tech enterprises like Google, Apple, Amazon, as they will now also be subject to a separate regulatory regime. This could lead to unintended consequences, such as reduced consumer choice and higher prices.

The CCI is looking into various cases of alleged competition law violations in the digital space and earlier had penalised some entities.

According to the report, there should be an agile and principle-based framework of ex-ante obligations under the bill. The specificities of the obligations as applicable to each core digital service would be specified through regulations drafted by the CCI through a consultative process, it added. *—PTI*

Sensex tanks 900 pts to slip below 73,000

MUMBAI, 13 MARCH

India's industrial production growth slowed to 3.8 per cent in January *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

Equity benchmark index Sensex on Wednesday crashed over 900 points to sink below the 73,000 level due to widespread selling pressure amid a sharp fall in smallcap and midcap indices.

Besides, deep losses in utility, energy and metal stocks and recent selling by foreign investors added to the gloom, analysts said.

Benchmark indices started the session on a positive note, but the selling intensified during afternoon trade, with all sectoral indices ending in the red.

The 30-share index tanked 906.07 points or 1.23 per cent to settle at 72,761.89. During the day, it dropped 1,152.25 points or 1.56 per cent to 72,515.71.

The Nifty plummeted 338 points or 1.51 per cent to 21,997.70.

Power Grid was the biggest loser in the Sensex pack, sliding over 7 per cent, followed by NTPC, Tata Steel, Tata Motors, JSW Steel, Bharti Airtel, Titan, Reliance Industries and Hindustan Unilever.

In contrast, ITC, ICICI Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Nestle, Bajaj Finance and HDFC Bank were the gainers.

- Power Grid was the biggest loser in the Sensex pack, sliding over 7 per cent, followed by NTPC, Tata Steel, Tata Motors, JSW Steel, Bharti Airtel, Titan, Reliance Industries and Hindustan Unilever.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge tanked by 5.11 per cent, while the midcap index declined by 4.20 per cent.

India's industrial production growth slowed to 3.8 per cent in January, while the February retail inflation at 5.09 per cent remained within the Reserve Bank's comfort zone for the sixth straight month, according to the latest government data.

The BSE benchmark ended 165.32 points or 0.22 per cent higher at 73,667.96 on Tuesday. The Nifty ended flat at 22,335.70, up 3.05 points or 0.01 per cent. *—PTI*

ITC shares jump 9%; mcap soars by Rs 32,127 crore

KOLKATA, 13 MARCH

ITC shares planned to be sold by BAT is around Rs 17,659.72 crore *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

Shares of ITC were in the limelight on Wednesday, climbing nearly 9 per cent and adding Rs 32,127.11 crore to its market valuation, amid stake sale news.

The stock zoomed 8.59 per cent to Rs 439 on the BSE.

Shares of the company jumped 8.29 per cent to Rs 438 on the NSE.

The company's market capitalisation (mcap) soared by Rs 32,127.11 crore to Rs 5,36,453.59 in the morning trade.

It was the biggest gainer among the BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty firms.

British multinational BAT PLC on Tuesday said it plans to sell up to 3.5 per cent stake in India's ITC Ltd to institutional investors through a block trade.

British American Tobacco PLC (BAT), the single largest shareholder in ITC Ltd (ITC), said its wholly-owned subsidiary Tobacco Manufacturers (India) Ltd (TMI) intends to sell up to 43,68,51,457 ordinary shares in the Indian diversified entity to institutional investors by way of an accelerated bookbuild process (block trade).

Based on Tuesday's closing price of Rs 404.25 per share, the value of the total ITC shares planned to be sold by BAT is around Rs 17,659.72 crore.

"The block trade shares represent up to 3.5 per cent of ITC's issued ordinary share capital," it said, adding, that following the completion of the proposed block trade, BAT will remain a significant shareholder of ITC, with 25.5 per cent holding.

BAT's initial investment in ITC dates back to the early 1900s and the two companies have a long-standing, mutually beneficial relationship, the statement said. The company said it intends to use the net proceeds of the block trade to buy back BAT shares over a period ending December 2025, starting with 700 million pound in 2024. *—PTI*

'Ist chip from Tata's plant will be out in 2026'

DHOLERA, 13 MARCH

The first set of semiconductors will start rolling out from Tata Electronics' plant here in December 2026, union minister for communications and IT Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Wednesday.

Speaking at the ground-breaking ceremony of Tata Group and CG Power chip plants, Vaishnaw said India will be among the top five chip ecosystems in the world by 2029.

He said Tata's Dholera plant will make chips in 28, 50, 55 nanometer node.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday laid the foundation of three chip plants -- two units by Tata Electronics and the third by CG Power -- entailing total investment of Rs 1.26 lakh crore.

The three plants include the country's first high-tech chip manufacturing plant of Tata Electronics which the company is setting up in partnership with Taiwan's Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corp at Dholera's special industrial region.

The plant will have the capacity to produce 50,000 wafers per month and involve an investment of Rs 91,000 crore.

The Centre will contribute 50 per cent of the capex on pari passu basis.

Ashwini Vaishnaw *PHOTO: PTI*

These chips driven by advanced technology will cater to multiple sectors -- power management chips for electric vehicles (EV), telecom, defence, automotive, consumer electronics, display, and power electronics.

Semiconductor is a "foundational" industry touching almost every aspect of life, powering everything from fridge to ACs and cars, aircraft to trains.

Vaishnaw said efforts were being made to set up a semiconductor industry in India since 1962 but it has become successful now.

He said foundation of three large semiconductor projects is a record in the world.

"India will be among top five semiconductor ecosystems by 2029," Vaishnaw said.

Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran said the Tata Electronics' emiconductor projects will initially create 50,000 direct and indirect jobs. *—PTI*

Veg oil imports down 13% in Feb to 9.75 lakh tonnes: SEA

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

India's vegetable oils import fell 13 per cent year-on-year in February to nearly 9.75 lakh tonne, according to industry data.

In a statement on Wednesday, the Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA) said the import of vegetable oils (comprising edible oils and non-edible oils) during February stood at 9,74,85 tonnes as compared to 11,14,481 tonnes in the year-ago period.

Out of the total imports, the edible oil shipments fell to 9,67,852 tonnes last month from 10,98,475 tonnes in February 2023.

Non-edible oil imports too fell to 7,000 tonnes from 16,006 tonnes in the year-ago period.

During November 2023-February 2024 period, the overall import of vegetable oils declined 21 per cent to 46,47,963 tonnes from 58,87,900 tonnes in the corresponding period of the previous oil year.

The oil marketing year runs from November to October.

Edible oils import fell to 46,15,551 tonne during the first four months of the 2023-24 oil year from 58,44,765 tonne in the year-ago period.

Non-edible oil imports dropped to 32,412 tonnes during the November-February period of 2023-24 oil year from 43,135 tonnes in the corresponding period of the previous year.

India meets more than 50 per cent of its domestic requirements of edible oils through imports.

The country imports palm oil from Indonesia and Malaysia. It imports soyabean oil from Argentina and Brazil.

"The decline of vegetable oil imports continued in February 2024. The availability of palm oil for edible oil requirements has come down as the main two producers Malaysia and Indonesia are diverting it for the production of biodiesel," SEA said. *—PTI*

GOVT WILL FULFILL 874 MN TONNES COAL NEED: JOSHI

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

The coal ministry is geared up to fulfill the 874 million tonnes coal demand for the power sector in financial year 2024-25, Union Minister Pralhad Joshi said on Wednesday.

For the financial year ending 31 March, the Power Ministry had placed a requirement of 821 million tonnes, Joshi told PTI on the sidelines of the release of 'PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan in Coal Sector' booklet.

"We are going to cross 1 billion tonne coal production by this March," he said.

The share of imported coal for blending purposes has gone down this fiscal compared to last financial year, Joshi said.

In FY24, coal import for blending was around 22.20 million tonnes, while it was at 30.80 million tonnes in the financial year 2022-23, he said.

Savings to the tune of Rs 82,264 crores had been made through the reduction of coal imports in just one year, Joshi said.

The government is also aiming to make the import of coal to 'nil' by 2026.

The coal ministry is also engaged with the Ministry of Railways for availability of rakes, Joshi said.

The average availability of rakes for transportation of coal has also improved from 369 rakes per day last fiscal to 392 rakes/a day till date, he said. *—PTI*

Google stops poll queries for Gemini

CALIFORNIA, 13 MARCH

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Google has confirmed it is restricting the types of election-related questions users can ask its Artificial Intelligence (AI) chatbot Gemini.

In a blog post, it said the policy had been rolled out in India, which will hold elections starting in April.

It comes as the firm aims to avoid more controversy over AI technology.

Gemini is essentially Google's version of the viral chatbot ChatGPT. It can answer questions in text form, and it can also generate pictures.

A spokesperson for Google told the BBC that the latest move was part of plans announced last year around its approach to elections.

Elections are due to be held in countries around the world this year including the US, UK and South Africa.

When the BBC asked Gemini questions about those elections it responded each time with: "I'm still learning how to answer this question. In the meantime, try Google Search." In recent weeks India has told technology companies that they need approval before releasing AI tools that are "unreliable" or being trialled.

In February, Google apologised after its recently launched AI image generator created an image of the US Founding Fathers which inaccurately included a black man. *—BBC News*

MEESHO INITIATES ESOP BUYBACK WORTH ₹200 CR

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Online shopping platform Meesho on Wednesday said it will spend Rs 200 crore to buyback shares from about 1,700 former as well as existing employees.

Eligible current and ex-employees across the spectrum, from junior-level executives to senior leadership can voluntarily participate in this program, the company said in a statement. The Indian marketplace announced "the initiation of an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) buyback programme of Rs 200 crore, making it the company's largest ESOP liquidity pool to date".

Enabling opportunities for wealth creation for nearly 1,700 past as well as present employees, this initiative continues to reaffirm Meesho's belief in the collective success of its team. *—PTI*

'Switch Paytm FASTag by 15 March'

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

NHAI has advised Paytm FASTag users to obtain a new FASTag from another bank before March 15 to ensure a smooth travel experience and avoid inconvenience at toll plazas, an official statement said on Wednesday.

This will help avoid penalties or double fee charges while commuting on National Highways, as per the statement.

Following the Reserve Bank of India's guidelines on restrictions concerning Paytm Payments Bank, the statement said Paytm FASTag users will no longer have the option to recharge or top-up their balance after March 15, 2024. However, they can continue to use the existing balance to pay tolls beyond the stipulated date, it added.

NHAI also advised Paytm FASTag users to reach out to their respective banks or refer to the FAQs provided on the IHMCL (Indian Highway Management Company Limited) website. Last month, RBI had advised customers as well as merchants of Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) to shift their accounts to other banks by 15 March.

RBI had also said withdrawal or utilisation of balances by PPBL customers from their accounts, including saving bank accounts, current accounts, prepaid instruments, FASTags, national common mobility cards, will be permitted without any restrictions. *—PTI*

DESPITE WARS

Global trade growth likely to accelerate in 2024, says report

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

Globalisation reached a record high in 2022 and stayed nearly as high in 2023, despite various global shocks over the past decade, such as the Covid-19, wars in Ukraine and Gaza, and the US-China trade conflict, a report said on Wednesday.

The "New DHL Global Connectedness Report 2024" by DHL and New York University's Stern School of Business, released here, also said that the share of global output traded internationally was back to a record high level in 2022.

After a slowdown in 2023, trade growth is forecast to accelerate in 2024, it said. Trade growth played a crucial role in boosting connectedness.

The report tracks how flows of trade, capital, information, and people move around the world and measure the globalisation of 181 countries and territories.

The globalisation of information flows has notably surged over the past two decades, even though the latest data show a slowdown in their growth, partly due to less research collaboration between the US and China

Corporate globalisation is rising, with companies expanding their international presence and earning more sales abroad, it said. He further said that expanding markets and fostering opportunities empower individuals, businesses, and entire nations to flourish in unique ways.

The report affirms the considerable potential to continue growing global flows. The report ranked Singapore as among the top most globalised countries followed by the Netherlands.

According to it, 143 countries became more globally connected, while only 38 saw their levels of connectedness decline.

Further evidence shows that Europe is the world's most globally connected region, followed by North America and the Middle East & North Africa, it said 'The DHL Global Connectedness Report' also shows that US-China ties continue to diminish, with the shares of both countries' flows involving each other decreasing by about one-quarter since 2016.

143 countries became more globally connected, while only 38 saw their levels of connectedness decline *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

TATA IPL

KNOW THE TEAMS

DELHI CAPITALS

Skipper Rishabh Pant's comeback to the camp will boost the team's spirit. Backed by experienced seasoned players, DC might prove to be tough on the Opposition

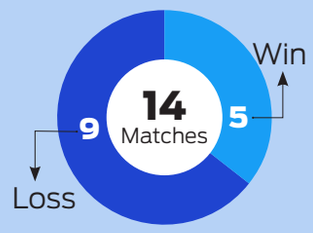
Kuldeep Yadav
Key Bowler

14	10	7.37
Inngs (Innings)	Wkts (Wickets)	Eco (Economy)
15/2	0	
BBI (Best Bowling in innings)	4W (Wickets)	

STRENGTHS

The team confirmed the return of skipper Rishabh Panth for the season. The team has bought Jhye Richardson which will add up to their pace battery in the league

2023 IPL RECORDS



WEAKNESS

DC lacks good openers. Not having proper left-right combination in the middle. The team is also short on all-rounders

David Warner
Key Batsman

36.86	86	14
Avg (Average)	HS (Highest Score)	Inngs (Innings)
131.63	69	10
SR (Strike Rate)	4s (Fours)	6s (sixes)

SQUAD

Squad: Rishabh Pant(C),Ricky Bhui, Yash Dhull, Prithvi Shaw, David Warner, Abishek Porel, Harry Brook,Shai Hope,Tristan Stubbs,Lalit Yadav,Mitchell Marsh,Axar Patel,Sumit Kumar, Khaleel Ahmed, Praveen Dubey, Kuldeep Yadav, Mukesh Kumar, Anrich Nortje,Vicky Ostwal, Rasikh Salam,Jhye Richardson, Ishant Sharma, Swastik Chikara, Kumar Kushagra

SCHEDULE

23 March vs PBKS	28 March vs RR	31 March vs CSK	5 April vs KKR
Mohali	Jaipur	Vishakhapatnam	Vishakhapatnam

Defiant Vidarbha prolongs Mumbai's wait

Vidarbha needs 290 runs with five wickets in hand

MUMBAI, 13 MARCH

A dogged fightback from Vidarbha, led by Karun Nair (74) and skipper Akshay Wadkar (56 not out), prolonged Mumbai's wait for a 42nd Ranji Trophy title as the visiting side reached 248/5 in pursuit of a mammoth 538 on the fourth and penultimate day of the final here on Wednesday.

Set an improbable target to win the summit clash after being outplayed since the first day afternoon, Vidarbha put up a resolute show with the bat to frustrate their hosts by resorting to stonewalling for the majority of the day.

Nair, who joined the Vidarbha ranks only at the start of this season, was at the forefront of their resistance as he faced as many as 220 balls while batting for 287 minutes to keep Mumbai at bay.

But the right-handed batter ultimately fell to the brilliance of Musheer Khan late in the day, with the 19-year-old producing a superb bowling show after setting up the game with 136 in the second innings.

Mumbai's Shams Mulani with teammates celebrates the wicket of Vidarbha's Atharva Taide during the fourth day of the Ranji Trophy final cricket match *PHOTO: PTI*

Nair's skipper Wadkar was batting on 56 with Harsh Dubey (11 not out) for company. The team required another 290 runs with five wickets in hand.

Mumbai managed a couple of wickets each in the first two sessions and the vital scalp of Nair in the last. They took the second new ball in the 82nd over of the innings.

Up until then, Mumbai had tried almost everything on what remained a placid pitch at the Wankhede Stadium. It had more on offer for the home team's spinners who remained persistent throughout. Mumbai's troika of right-arm pacers took turns to come around the wickets to try and bounce out Vidarbha, while spinners operated from both ends to challenge the batters' techniques.In the end, Vidarbha walked away with a moral win of sorts having not capitulated given the occasion and pressure of the final and the fact that a target of 538 is perceived as out of reach for most batting line-ups. Brief scores: Mumbai 224 & 418 lead Vidarbha 105 & 248/5 in 92 overs (Atharva Taide 32, Aman Mokhade 32, Karun Nair 74, Akshay Wadkar 56*; Tanush Kotian 2/56, Musheer Khan 2/38) by 290 runs. *—PTI*

Rohit Sharma, Ravichandran Ashwin and Jasprit Bumrah *PHOTO: PTI*

Ashwin replaces Bumrah in the ICC Test rankings

DUBAI, 13 MARCH

A nine-wicket haul in his 100th Test match helped Indian off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin re-claim the top spot in the bowlers' list, while his captain Rohit Sharma was back in the top-10 at sixth in the batting charts of the latest ICC rankings on Wednesday.

Ashwin was at his best throughout the Dharamsala contest against England as the experienced right-armer picked up four wickets in the first innings and then a 36th five-wicket haul in the second innings as India cruised to a dominant triumph in the fifth and final Test of their series.

The big haul helped Ashwin move past teammate Jasprit Bumrah into the premier position that he previously held earlier this year, the ICC said in a statement.

Rohit, who smashed a hundred in Dharmsala, rose five places to sixth and within 108 rating points of No.1 ranked Test batter Kane Williamson.

Yashasvi Jaiswal (up two places to eighth) and Shubman Gill (up 11 spots to equal 20th) reached new career-best ratings following an excellent individual series against Ben Stokes' side.

Bumrah fell into a share of the second position with Australia seamer Josh Hazlewood following his six scalps in the second Test against New Zealand in Christchurch.

Ashwin's teammate Kuldeep Yadav earned a new career-high rating and jumped 15 places to 16th overall on the latest rankings following his seven wickets and Player of the Match heroics against England.

New Zealand's Matt Henry (up six spots to 12th) also moved up to a career-best mark.

India spinner Ravindra Jadeja remained well out in front of second-placed Ashwin in the updated list for Test all-rounders, with Australia skipper Pat Cummins (up two places to eighth) and Henry (up six spots to 11th) among the big movers. *—AP*

PHOTO: PTI

Bairstow available for Punjab Kings for full IPL season

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

England batter Jonny Bairstow will be available for the entire duration of the Indian Premier League, beginning March 22, despite returning home only recently following a long Test tour of India.On the sidelines of the Dharamsala Test, the BCCI officials were in talks with their England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) counterparts over the availability of their players for the IPL.Test regulars like skipper Ben Stokes, Joe Root, and Mark Wood had already made themselves unavailable for the lucrative T20 league as part of ECB's workload management following the five-Test series that ended in Dharamsala on Sunday."Bairstow is expected to arrive in India on March 18 or 19 and will be available for the team's first game against Delhi Capitals on March 23," said an IPL source. Bairstow, who played his 100th Test in Dharamsala, had a forgettable time with the bat in India and would be looking to be back among the runs in the IPL.*—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

AFC asks for evidence of charges against Chaubey

NEW DELHI, 13 MARCH

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has asked the AIFF's ousted legal head, Nilanjan Bhattacharjee, to submit evidence for the allegations of corruption he has leveled against national federation head Kalyan Chaubey, calling it a serious matter.AIFF president Chaubey on 6 March served a legal notice to the organisation's former principal legal advisor Bhattacharjee for accusing him of corruption. Bhattacharjee, in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has alleged that Chaubey was part of non-transparent tender processes and made attempts to "siphon off money from the federation" for personal expenses.*—PTI*

Rawalpindi and Lahore to host 5 T20Is against NZ

LAHORE, 13 MARCH

Pakistan will host New Zealand in a five-match Twenty20 International series next month as part of its preparations for the T20 World Cup.The Pakistan Cricket Board on Wednesday said Rawalpindi will host three games on April 18, 20, and 21 and the remaining two will be played at Lahore on 25 and 27 April.New Zealand will likely be missing several frontline players including Daryl Mitchell, Mitchell Santner, and Lockie Ferguson, who will be playing in the Indian Premier League. New Zealand beat Pakistan 4-1 at home in Shaheen Shah Afridi's debut T20I series as skipper earlier this year.*—AP*

Al Hilal players celebrate the trophy of Riyadh Season Cup 2024 at Kingdom Arena Stadium in Riyadh *PHOTO: AFP*

Al-Hilal wins 28th straight game to set record, Saudi team reaches s/fs

ABU DHABI, 13 MARCH

Saudi Arabian team Al-Hilal set a world record for a top-tier team by winning its 28th straight game with a 2-0 victory over Al-Ittihad to reach the Asian Champions League semifinals on Tuesday.

Al-Hilal had also won the quarterfinals first leg by the same score to advance 4-0 on aggregate over its domestic rival.

The 18-time Saudi champion broke the previously recognized record of 27 straight wins set by The New Saints in the 2016-17 season. The Welsh team took the mark from the great Ajax team inspired by Johan Cruyff in 1971-72."Everyone at Al Hilal is delighted to achieve world football history by winning 28 consecutive matches," Al-Hilal coach Jorge Jesus said. "This is truly an incredible achievement and I want to thank everyone at the club for their part in this momentous winning record."

Al Hilal's dominating season follows the club spending about 350 million euros ($380 million) on player transfers after being effectively nationalized by the Saudi sovereign wealth operation, the Public Investment Fund. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman controls it.

The last time the team did not win was on Sept. 21 in a 1-1 draw against league rival Damac.

Al-Hilal, already champion of Asia four times, is 12 points clear atop the Saudi Pro League.

"As I have said throughout this period, however, records do not matter as much as trophies," Jesus said. "It is up to everyone at Al-Hilal to ensure that we close out the season as Roshn Saudi League champions and meet our targets in the cup competitions. Only then can we truly celebrate." *—AP*

Alcaraz advances to the q/fs at Indian Wells

INDIAN WELLS, 13 MARCH

Second-ranked Carlos Alcaraz avenged a previous loss to Fabian Marozsan, winning 6-3, 6-3 on Tuesday to reach the quarterfinals of the BNP Paribas Open as the top remaining seed in the men's draw.

A day after "lucky loser" Luca Nardi stunned No. 1 Novak Djokovic in the third round at Indian Wells, Alcaraz advanced easily over the Hungarian who ousted him from the Italian Open in May. Marozsan was a qualifier and the No. 135 player in the world when he upset Alcaraz — then on the verge of taking the top spot in the rankings — 6-3, 7-6 (4) in the third round in Rome.

"Honestly, I was nervous before the match. I'm not going to lie," Alcaraz said. "Playing against someone that beat you. ... Today I knew what I had to do."

Carlos Alcaraz *PHOTO: AFP*

Jannik Sinner *PHOTO: AFP*

Jannik Sinner wins 18th straight match

Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner beat Ben Shelton 7-6 (4), 6-1 later Tuesday for his 18th consecutive victory. The third-ranked Italian has won 15 matches in a row to start 2024, claiming titles at Melbourne and Rotterdam. It was the 150th hard-court victory for the 22-year-old Sinner, who became first player born in the 2000s to reach that milestone. Sinner had a set point, up 5-4 and 40-30 in the first, before Shelton was saved by a net cord.

It then took Sinner another 15 minutes to close out the first set; in the second, he went up 3-0 and coasted to the victory. Sinner advanced to the quarterfinals to play Jiri Lehecka, a 6-2, 6-4 winner over Stefanos Tsitsipas.

—AP

RACHIN RAVINDRA BAGS SIR RICHARD HADLEE MEDAL

CHRISTCHURCH, 13 MARCH

The biggest find of New Zealand's World Cup campaign in India, Rachin Ravindra on Wednesday became the youngest recipient of the Sir Richard Hadlee Medal after becoming the country's best male cricketer of the year. Among women, Melanie Kerr grabbed the major prizes at the New Zealand Cricket Awards.Kane Williamson was recognised for his outstanding form in the Test arena with the ANZ Test Player of the Year Award, and winning the Redpath Cup for men's first-class batting. At 24, Ravindra is the youngest winner in the award's history. *—AP*

Shafali smashes 71 as DC secures direct qualification into the WPL final

NEW DELHI, 13 MAR

The big-hitting Shafali Verma led the way with a blazing 37-ball 71 as a dominant Delhi Capitals secured direct qualification into the final of the Women's Premier League with a seven-wicket hammering of Gujarat Giants here on Wednesday.

Table-toppers Delhi Capitals entered the game looking to bag a direct spot in the final and once their bowlers restricted Giants to 126 for nine with a disciplined show at the Arun Jaitley Stadium, the hosts inched closer to realizing their goal.In the final on Sunday, the Capitals will play the winner of the eliminator between Mumbai Indians and Royal Challengers Bangalore.As she is wont to, Shafali launched into a furry of boundaries, including hitting as many as five sixes and seven fours, to help her side complete the chase of 127 without much ado.DC finished the game with as many as 41 balls remaining.Shafali reached her fifty in just 28 balls. She got to the landmark with a four-over extra cover off Mannat Kashyap.

—PTI

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Arsenal beat Porto on penalties for the first time since 2010

BARCELONA, 13 MARCH

Arsenal edged out Porto on penalties to reach the Champions League quarter-finals for the first time since 2010 on Tuesday after their last-16 tie finished 1-1 on aggregate.

Fermín López, João Cancelo, and Robert Lewandowski scored for Barcelona as it advanced 4-2 on aggregate after a 1-1 draw in the first leg in Italy three weeks ago.

Amir Rrahmani scored for Napoli, which couldn't repeat its last-eight appearance from last season when it won a knockout round for the first time. Barcelona had been eliminated in the group stage the last two years and hadn't reached the quarterfinals since 2019-20 when it lost to Bayern Munich.

"It was an incredible night," Barcelona midfielder Sergi Roberto said. "It had been four years since this club was where it deserved to be. We have to enjoy this moment."

In the other Champions League match on Tuesday, Arsenal eliminated Porto in a penalty shootout after a 1-1 aggregate draw.

The Champions League could be Barcelona's last realistic chance for a title this season. It was eliminated in the Copa del Rey and trails Spanish league leader Real Madrid by seven points. Coach Xavi Hernández already announced he will leave at the end of the season.

David Raya's crucial penalty saves propelled Arsenal to the quarter-finals of the UEFA Champions League *PHOTO: AFP*

"It was a great match, very complete," Xavi said. "We have been criticized unfairly, and today we showed that this team is prepared to compete in Europe. We are among the best eight teams in Europe. We have to enjoy it."

Barcelona in 3-1 win over Napoli

Four years later, Barcelona is again celebrating a triumph in the knockout stage of the Champions League. The five-time European champions returned to the quarterfinals with a 3-1 win over Napoli on Tuesday, March 12. Fermín López, João Cancelo, and Robert Lewandowski scored for Barcelona as it advanced 4-2 on aggregate after a 1-1 draw in the first leg in Italy three weeks ago. Amir Rrahmani scored for Napoli, which couldn't repeat its last-eight appearance from last season when it won a knockout round for the first time.

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